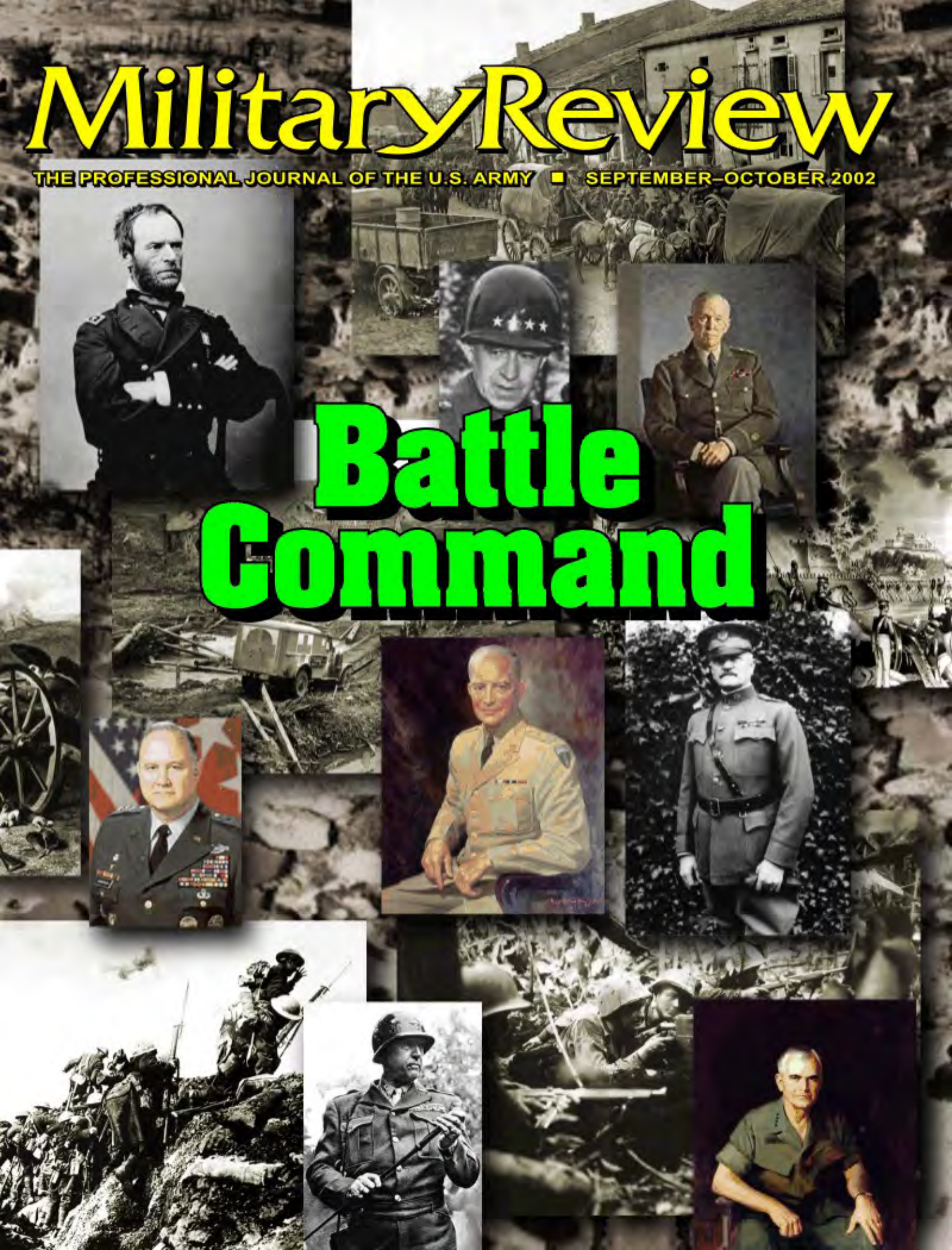


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Irredentism in MexAmerica

Mark de Socio and Christian Allen argue that economic and cultural integration along the U.S.-Mexico border is creating a "borderline nation" whose identity is distinct from the United States or from Mexico. Despite this integration, a history of territorial and ethnic antagonisms, acerbated by law enforcement efforts to stem illicit drug trafficking and undocumented migration, is creating social conflict. The result is an irredentism unique to MexAmerica.

Cars wait for inspection at U.S. Customs / Border Patrol checkpoint at Hidalgo, Texas. The county is the site of some of the most intense drug smuggling activity along the entire border. The construction of two new commercial bridges here complicate law enforcement efforts.

BORDERLANDS often function as crucibles in which new and distinct national identities emerge. Contextual factors in forming frontier identities include increased economic and cultural integration, the presence of border patrols and law enforcement agencies, economic disparities across international borders, and illicit migrant and commodities traffic commonly associated with frontier lands.¹ Neighboring states' core institutions are often weak in frontier zones, and emerging borderland identities are sometimes at odds with existing states, thus prompting state efforts to secure or resecure boundaries.² The incongruence between culturally based transnational identity and state identity can generate pressure for formal political separation.³

Complex border landscapes are produced through a unique set of cultural, economic, and political processes that occur over space.⁴ To understand these processes, consider a "localized, particularistic, and territorially focused notion of borders" applied to the U.S.-Mexico border region noted for its spaciousness, its juxtaposition of core and periphery, and its peculiar situational context of integration and fragmentation.⁵ The U.S.-Mexico border region exhibits a high degree of economic and social integration that is increasingly recognized as a borderline nation that is distinct from both the United States and Mexico (see the map). This article examines the intertwined economic and social processes that define the frontier landscape that au-

thor Joel Garreau illustratively calls "MexAmerica."⁶

Low-intensity social conflict can be expected to accompany increased cross-border integration, particularly illicit drug trafficking, undocumented migration, and law enforcement responses.⁷ However, in the historical and situational context of U.S.-Mexico border dynamics, including a history of territorial and ethnic antagonisms, routine levels of social conflict are magnified. The United States' efforts to assert its sovereignty over the border periphery have heightened social conflict in the region. Consequently, irredentism is a potentially serious manifestation of intensifying social conflict.

Irredentism

The term "irredentism," from the Italian word "irredenta," meaning unredeemed, was coined to describe "the Italian movement to annex Italian-speaking areas under Austrian and Swiss rule during the nineteenth century. It has since come to encompass any political effort to unite ethnically, historically, or geographically related segments of a population in adjacent countries within a common political framework."⁸ Author Donald L. Horowitz defines irredentism as "a movement by members of an ethnic group in one state to retrieve ethnically kindred people and their territory across borders."⁹ Hedva Ben-Israel reports that "the key aspect of irredentism . . . is the tension between land and people."¹⁰ Yet another author, Jacob M. Landau, defines irredentism as "an ideological or organizational expression of passionate interest in the welfare of an ethnic minority living outside the boundaries of the state peopled by that same group. Moderate irredentism expresses a desire to defend

The U.S.-Mexico border region is characterized by an extensive degree of economic and social integration. A long history of economic and cultural interaction among residents on both sides of the border has led to the emergence of a transnational region that shares a single transnational identity.



Laredo, Texas.

the kindred group from discrimination or assimilation, while a more extreme manifestation aims at annexing the territories which the group inhabits.”¹¹ Naomi Chazan identifies three broad typologies of irredentism:

- A population that forms an ethnic majority in a contiguous region within a country in which it is otherwise an ethnic minority may attempt to withdraw or secede from its political framework to merge with a neighboring state where ethnic kin form the national majority.

- A state whose ethnic majority population is a minority in a neighboring state may attempt to incorporate that neighbor’s regions where its ethnic kin is concentrated to form regional majorities.

- An ethnic minority that spans two or more neighboring countries but that forms a majority in a contiguous transnational region.

Chazan and Horowitz provide contemporary examples of irredentist phenomena, ranging from the conflict in Kosovo (type I) to the conflict in the Kurdish regions of Turkey, Iraq, and Iran (type III). Iran’s claim on Bahrain is an example of type II irredentism.¹² MexAmerican irredentism is a new hybrid type IV that is unique in its complex, multidirectional integration of territory and transnational identity.

The theoretical formulations of irredentism that Chazan, Horowitz, and Ben-Israel present fall short

significantly. Primarily, these authors fail to appreciate power dynamics’ constraints on irredentist movements. For example, Horowitz notes that secessionism is far more prevalent than irredentism in international affairs, even in countries where secessionist regions would fare worse economically as independent states. He attributes this to groups choosing secession over irredentism, given that secession is a required first step for any irredentist platform to be realized.

Horowitz states: “Secessionist regions are disproportionately ill favored in resources and per capita income. Not infrequently, groups attempt to withdraw from states from which their region actually receives a subsidy. In numbers that are both absolute and relative to the possibilities, secession is much more frequent than irredentism, and this despite the enormous obstacles to success and the disadvantages most secessionist regions would face were they to succeed. By contrast, irredentism is rare, even though the [second] subtype of the definition of irredentism would usually involve the armed forces of one state in retrieving kinsmen across borders from another. One reason there are few irredentas may be that many groups that have a choice between irredentism and secession find the latter the more satisfying choice. Indeed, the potential for irredentism may increase the frequency and strength of secession, but not vice versa.”¹³

Horowitz does not consider that the infrequency of explicitly irredentist platforms is a result of hegemonic group dynamics. This is not to say that other authors do not recognize the existence of power relations, especially given that irredentism and secession often arise from explicit or perceived hegemony of majority populations or state institutions over minority populations. Indeed, Chazan alludes to power dynamics by asserting that irredentist sentiments can lay dormant for years, even decades, until an opportunity arises for its expression. However, she does not elaborate on why irredentism may lay dormant for any number of years.

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We contend that irredentism does not necessarily lay dormant. Rather, irredentism is a form of intensified social conflict. In cases where social conflict is minimal or nonexistent, irredentism may also be nonexistent. In cases where social conflict does exist, irredentist aspirations may be stifled by a real or perceived threat of repercussion from politically empowered populations or from the state. Landau acknowledges that irredentism can be an expression rather than an overt action. This definition allows for the explanation of irredentist cases that may have emerged after years of dormancy. More important, it supports the notion of irredentism as a form of social conflict that exists even where irredentist solutions to intensifying social conflict face long odds, given the dominating state's hegemonic status.

The notion of irredentism as an expression, or form of social conflict, is important in other ways. It acknowledges that nations are social constructs, mean-

ing that group identification is value laden and flexible. The fluidity of nations as social constructs allows populations to politically mobilize against perceived social injustices and discrimination by drawing closer together through constructing iconographies and group identities. Second, irredentism as expression allows for a broader interpretation, freeing us from rigid criteria in which a set of stipulations must be met and assuming that only at some ill-defined point in a complex process does irredentism become irredentism. Chazan recognizes such operational constraints when she writes, "The definition of irredentism therefore requires refinement and elaboration, with particular emphasis on the possible fluidity of irredentism in specific historical and situational contexts."¹⁴

A multiscale review of spatial processes operating in the U.S.-Mexico border region underscores the flexible nature of irredentism in a specific

A unique culture with shared languages, values, and cultural traditions separates the border region from both the United States and Mexico. "Spanglish," a distinct regional linguistic fusion of Spanish and English, is spoken commonly throughout the border area. . . . Social and cultural interaction have advanced to such a degree that cities in northern Mexico exhibit urban forms generally associated with U.S. postwar urban development.

historical and situational context and offers a more nuanced understanding of borderland processes occurring there. The process of irredentism is fundamentally geographic, encompassing social and political conflict in space, with significant implications for static states and dynamic nations.

The U.S.-Mexico Border's Historical Geography

Strong centrifugal forces in the form of sectionalism and federalism historically have been present in Mexican national politics since Mexico's independence from Spain in 1810. In its earliest years, the Mexican state struggled to maintain its territorial integrity, and U.S. (Anglo) migration into the province of Tejas was of particular concern.¹⁵ To delay a seemingly inevitable conflict with an expansionist United States, Mexico formally invited Anglo settlers to help develop its barren northern frontier. Mexican politics remained volatile, however, and when Mexico "formally refused to grant concessions to Anglo-American Texans analogous to those given to Louisianans by the United States, outright rebellion began. The independent Republic of Texas was proclaimed on March 1, 1836, and its sovereignty was assured following victory in the Battle of San Jacinto on April 21."¹⁶

Texas became an independent state, but Mexico refused to relinquish its sovereignty. While Mexican politics remained fractious, recovering its renegade province was one issue that consistently rallied popular support throughout the country. Despite sectional politics of its own that had until then delayed Texas' formal integration into the United States, U.S. President James Polk unilaterally annexed Texas in April 1846, prompting Mexico to declare war. In Mexico, and among many Mexican-Americans, the war is commonly referred to today as the North American invasion.¹⁷ Despite having declared war, Mexico fought a defensive struggle that quickly proved unsuccessful. By 1848, U.S. forces occupied Mexico City, and Mexico was forced to negotiate peace on U.S. terms. Author Rudolpho Acuña asserts that it



A storefront in Reynosa, Mexico.

Christian Allen

was under the duress of military occupation that Mexico agreed to the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Under the treaty, Mexico relinquished control of not only Texas but of territories comprising the modern U.S. states of New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, and California and parts of Colorado and Utah.¹⁸

The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo granted U.S. citizenship to inhabitants of the newly acquired territories and recognized their land holdings and titles. Yet, in the years after the war, Mexicans who lived in territories that were incorporated into the United

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States lost their lands to Anglos through "theft, intimidation, swindles, dubious legal challenges, and the burden of related court costs, taxes, and other debts, as well as purchases."¹⁹ Consequently, a conflict known as the Cortina war broke out in and around Brownsville, Texas, in 1859. Juan Cortina, a local rancher, led a revolt against Anglo settlers, gaining widespread support among Texas Mexicans, or mexicanos, who comprised most of the region's population.²⁰ This was perhaps the first violent manifestation of pro-Mexico irredentism on the U.S. side of the border, and U.S. military forces and Texas Rangers were deployed to end the rebellion. However, "for many years, mexicanos on both sides of the Rio Grande shared a[n] [irredentist] desire for reunion, since the river was a particularly artificial boundary in this area."²¹

Another irredentist program emerged around 1915, during the time of the Mexican Revolution, called the Plan de San Diego.²² The plan demanded that American occupation end and that an independent republic comprised of all or parts of Texas, New Mexico, Colorado, Arizona, and California be established. The rebellion lasted nearly 2 years as rebels raided Anglo ranches, banks, businesses, and forts before the U.S. Army, the Bureau of Investigation, and Texas Rangers reestablished order.²³ "Many [of the rebels] came from the classes of the Texas-Mexican community that were most threatened by the rapidly expanding Anglo farm economy, and the majority of the guerrilla raids took place in the counties most affected by this new economy."²⁴

Political fragmentation in Mexico led to rebellions on that side of the border as well. In 1840, local border adventurers in the northern Mexican states of Nuevo León, Tamaulipas, and Coahuila established the Republic of the Rio Grande and announced their intent to include parts of Texas in their new republic. This fringe effort fizzled as Mexico dispatched troops to the region and Texas Rangers deployed



to ensure the integrity of the Texas border.²⁵ Another self-styled independence movement occurred in the same region just a few years later. This time rebels proclaimed the "Republic of Sierra Madre," but it shared a similar fate.²⁶

After the Mexican Revolution, sporadic conflicts along the border subsided, effectively ushering in a new era of relative peace. Although overt military confrontation had subsided, low-intensity social conflict persisted primarily because of continuing social and economic discrimination against Mexican-Americans on the U.S. side of the border: "On the whole, it is clear that from its establishment in 1848 through the Mexican Revolution, the U.S.-Mexico border was the site of conflict as well as periodically intense, militarized efforts to pacify the region. Mexicanos did not quietly submit to Anglo domination, but rather contested the official definition of the border in a variety of ways, resisting Anglo control of the border region for some 70 years. Such open conflict and intense militarization did not occur after this period. This may have been in part due to the fearsome legacy of the pacification period. Events from that era made it clear that mexicanos on the U.S. side of the border occupied a subordinate position in the region and would suffer severe sanctions if they attempted to alter significantly the status quo. With this principle emphatically established, border militarization [and social conflict] assumed relatively subtle forms in subsequent decades."²⁷

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During this period of relative calm, economic and social integration between border communities substantially increased despite systematic discrimination against Mexican-Americans and Latinos on the U.S. side of the border. This discrimination persisted into the 1960s, including brief periods of intense police action and federal deportation programs such as Operation Wetback at the end of the Bracero Program in the 1950s.²⁸ Consequently, social conflict increased once again, culminating in the civil rights and Chicano movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Irredentism emerged as a form of expression in the socially constructed concept of Aztlán, or Chicano homeland, among many Latino activists.²⁹

Integration

Today, the U.S.-Mexico border region is characterized by an extensive degree of economic and social integration. A long history of economic and cultural interaction among residents on both sides of the border has led to the emergence of a transnational region that shares a single transnational identity.³⁰ Barry R. McCaffrey, former U.S. drug czar, describes the unique nature of this emerging region: "The culture of life here is not Mexican, or American, or Native American, or Spanish, or Hispanic. It is a [mixed] border culture, which is strengthened by diversity and made possible by the free flow of exchange between and among our societies."³¹ Author J. F. Holden-Rhodes comments: "Rather than an arbitrary line separating two countries, La Frontera is a state of mind that stretches for fifty to one hundred miles on either side of the border."³²

Indeed, a unique culture with shared languages, values, and cultural traditions separates the border region from both the United States and Mexico.³³ "Spanglish," a distinct regional linguistic fusion of Spanish and English, is spoken commonly throughout the border area. The region has produced a distinctive Tex-Mex cuisine now found in restaurants across the United States. The borderlands are home to a variety of musical genres, including Norteña and Tejano, performed by popular bands such as Aztlán

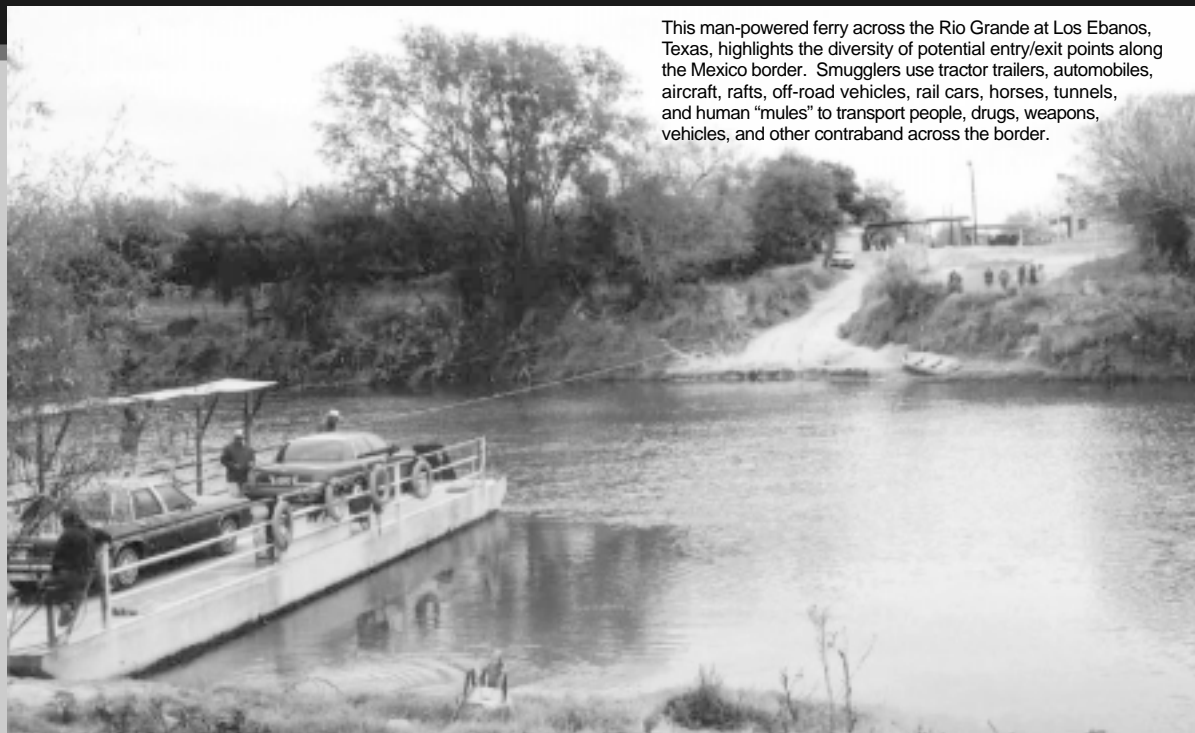
Underground and Rage Against the Machine. The late Tejano star, Selena, brought national attention to the distinct regional sound. Artists working in a variety of media have drawn inspiration from the region's unique character, making it more distinct.³⁴ Social and cultural interaction have advanced to such a degree that cities in northern Mexico exhibit urban forms generally associated with U.S. postwar urban development.³⁵

While this cultural integration is both noteworthy and important, developing an integrated border economy is even more striking. The past decade has seen a dramatic rise in U.S.-Mexican trade, the overwhelming majority of which passes through the border region. Regardless of whether this trade links consumers or producers actually located in MexAmerica, it generates cross-border economic integration. Warehousing, transportation, and other trade-related infrastructure and services represent a significant economic activity, considering the massive volume of traffic crossing the border at the 39 official points of entry and exit. In 1999, more than 4 million trucks and nearly half a million railcars carried goods through these channels.³⁶ With U.S.-Mexican trade likely to continue its upward trend, MexAmerica's prominence as facilitator and entrepot will increase apace.

Another important measure of growing economic integration is the United States' expanding flow of direct investment into Mexico. Direct investment represents relatively long-term, stable commitments to productive facilities and provides evidence of functional integration between the two economies. For a variety of reasons, most U.S. multinational firms operating in Mexico prefer locations on or near the border.³⁷ These factors include cultural familiarity, reduced shipping costs, and the demands of just-in-time inventory systems. While direct investment integrates the two national economies, it does substantially more to link Mexico's northern regional economy to the United States.

Preferences for border locations are reflected in the spatial distribution of Mexico's numerous assem-

The situational context of U.S.-Mexico border dynamics poses additional problems in light of current U.S. immigration and drug interdiction policies; most notably, the emergence of irredentism. For example, measures the U.S. Border Patrol has taken to stem the flow of illegal immigration into the United States have raised human rights concerns in the United States and Mexico.



This man-powered ferry across the Rio Grande at Los Ebanos, Texas, highlights the diversity of potential entry/exit points along the Mexico border. Smugglers use tractor trailers, automobiles, aircraft, rafts, off-road vehicles, rail cars, horses, tunnels, and human "mules" to transport people, drugs, weapons, vehicles, and other contraband across the border.

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bly manufacturing operations. Mexico's six border states are home to 2,600 plants that employ 540,000 workers and account for almost three-quarters of all maquiladora operations.³⁸ The maquiladora sector, the sector of assembly plants that finishes products for another country, has become one of Mexico's leading foreign exchange earners and an important contributing factor in economically integrating Mexico's border states with the United States. It has succeeded in allowing Mexico's border region to capitalize on its comparative advantage in cheap labor by attracting labor-intensive U.S. manufacturers from across the border. Mexican efforts to develop the maquiladora sector away from the border region have been only moderately successful. Most plants remain clustered in border cities like Matamoros, Nuevo Laredo, Ciudad Juarez, Tijuana, Mexicali, and Reynosa.

The maquiladora industry offers strong evidence that functional economic integration is occurring between the Mexican and U.S. economies. Yet, the tendency for maquiladoras to agglomerate along the

U.S.-Mexico border limits their ability to contribute to Mexican national economic development. They exhibit few meaningful forward or backward links with domestic Mexican industry, instead choosing to maintain their sources of supply on the U.S. side of the border.³⁹ Author Robert B. South reports that fewer than 2 percent of inputs for maquiladora operations come from Mexican sources.⁴⁰ Such figures indicate significant economic separation between the border region and the rest of Mexico and close ties between the northern border region and the southwestern United States.

Indeed, author Kevin F. McCarthy reports that "residents along the Mexican side of the border, in the face of their distance from the Federal District, the centralized pattern of decisionmaking in Mexico, and their superior income levels vis-à-vis the rest of the country, have far more reason to favor increased integration with United States border cities than do policy makers in Mexico City who already fear that the close connections between the northern border states and the United States threaten national

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integration. Correspondingly, U.S. residents in the borderlands have a vested interest in policies that increase the volume of trade between the two countries and promote the economic welfare of what has historically been among the poorest regions in the United States.⁴¹

Neoliberal economic reforms undertaken in Mexico since its 1982 debt crisis have had profound implications for U.S.-Mexico relations and for the development of MexAmerica. Most prominent among these reforms was adopting the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994.⁴² NAFTA liberalized trade by eliminating tariffs and other trade barriers and revised Mexico's nationalist investment regulations. These changes facilitated the dramatic increases in cross-border trade and investment discussed earlier. It is important to note that while the agreement significantly eased restrictions on capital flows, it carefully avoided any discussion of free labor movement between the two countries, a discrepancy that newly elected Mexican President Vicente Fox is addressing during recent calls to open the border.⁴³

NAFTA and the program of neoliberal reform of which it is a part present both opportunity and risk to Mexico. While Mexican standards of living are likely to improve in the long run from increased economic integration with the United States, there are real problems in the short and midterms. These problems result from the unequal distribution of benefits and adjustment costs among different regions, economic sectors, industries, social classes, and ethnic groups. Existing socioeconomic disparities and tensions have been exacerbated by Mexico's broad application of neoliberal reform without considering its extraordinary regional diversity.⁴⁴ The reforms have created "a new geography of economic and social development in Mexico."⁴⁵ With capitalism most developed and integration with the United States most advanced in the northern border region, it is likely that the north will benefit at the expense of other regions, further escalating regional inequalities and tensions.⁴⁶

Mexican Drug Trafficking and U.S. Antidrug Efforts

Increased trade and market liberalization at the border have come with unintended but not entirely unexpected increases in illicit trade as well. Mexico is now the leading foreign source of marijuana and methamphetamine, a major heroin source, and the favored transshipment destination for U.S.-bound cocaine.⁴⁷ In 1988, approximately one-fifth of U.S.-bound cocaine was smuggled through Mexico.⁴⁸ A decade later this figure had risen to approximately two-thirds of the total.⁴⁹ Conservative estimates of Mexico's illicit drug revenues—\$30 billion in 1994—suggest that the drug trade is the country's largest foreign exchange earner.⁵⁰

Deep cultural and economic links between the United States and Mexico provide border smugglers with numerous opportunities to move drug shipments into the United States. This fact is apparent in U.S. government documents that suggest that "contributing to enforcement problems are border communities in the U.S. that are linked by common cultural, familial, commercial, and industrial ties or interests to neighboring Mexico."⁵¹ The increasingly favored method of transportation is to conceal drug shipments within commercial traffic, and smuggling organizations have devised sophisticated methods for concealing large volumes of drugs within legitimate cargo shipments. The ever-rising tide of cross-border commercial traffic has clearly facilitated these sorts of operations.

Illicit trade flow is controlled by approximately 150 to 200 organizations, frequently comprised of close-knit family units.⁵² Historically, they were based in Mexico's northern border states and used their associations with Mexicans living in the United States to transport illicit goods across the border. Many of these networks are generations old, originating as gun smugglers during the Mexican Revolution. Then they smuggled alcohol into the United States during Prohibition. Originally, by smuggling consumer goods from the United States to circumvent Mexico's high tariff rates, they earned huge profits, and from there,

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The Border Patrol maintains a highly visible presence throughout Mex-America. While their primary mission is to deter and intercept undocumented migrants, they also play a major role in drug interdiction. (Inset) Border Patrol agents searching illegals, near Brownsville, Texas.



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they branched out into smuggling cocaine, marijuana, and heroin.⁵³

As their involvement in the cocaine trade deepened, the wealth and sophistication of these organizations increased dramatically. Until the early 1990s, the organizations acted as transportation subcontractors, moving Colombian cocaine from Mexico to U.S. warehouses that Colombian distributors owned. This arrangement gradually evolved as Mexican syndicates became more powerful. Mexican traffickers began to receive a portion of each shipment they moved across the border, giving them access to the lucrative U.S. wholesale market. They quickly developed their own distribution networks using the large numbers of people of Mexican descent living or working in the United States.⁵⁴

The U.S. response to Mexico's growing role in the drug trade is clear. The border region is viewed as "a critical line of defense in efforts to reduce drug availability in the United States."⁵⁵ The manpower and resources committed to border enforcement efforts by the Department of Defense, Drug Enforce-

ment Administration, U.S. Customs, and the Immigration and Naturalization Service all increased significantly beginning in 1993.⁵⁶ Federal antinarcotics efforts along the southwest border now involve seven departments and more than 11,000 officials, and cost approximately \$2 billion a year.⁵⁷

As antinarcotics efforts have intensified, they have become increasingly intertwined with efforts to halt illegal immigration. Moreover, the "influx of illegal migrant labor and the failure of U.S. supply-side approaches to halt the incoming flow of drugs is propelling a fusion between U.S. national security and domestic law enforcement agencies."⁵⁸ Military personnel are used in a variety of roles to support border law enforcement efforts, including training, intelligence, operational planning, surveillance, air transportation, radar and imaging missions, cargo inspection, and fence maintenance.⁵⁹

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Agencies involved in border enforcement adopting modern warfighting technologies like night-vision equipment, infrared scanning devices, movement sensors, and helicopters is further evidence of the military's influence along the border.⁶⁰ Author Timothy J. Dunn argues that such military-law enforcement cooperation, although subtle, has "a number of disturbing implications for the human and civil rights of residents and immigrants in the border region."⁶¹

Despite this substantial commitment of resources to increasingly aggressive counternarcotics operations, the price of cocaine in the United States has steadily dropped since the early 1980s while its availability and purity have increased.⁶² These are sure signs that interdiction efforts accomplish very little in terms of reducing available supply. Yet, the implications of pursuing costly, punitive, divisive, and ineffective antidrug operations in MexAmerica are serious indeed: intensified border enforcement efforts antagonize residents and needlessly contribute to an environment of social conflict. Such tension arises from the paradoxical nature of the major policies influencing the region. Market-oriented reforms facilitate the erosion of the international border while state prohibition of narcotics and labor strengthens it: "As old barriers between the United States and Mexico are being torn down under NAFTA and the two nations are drawn closer together, new barriers are rapidly being built up to keep them apart."⁶³

Intensifying Social Conflict

Author Oscar J. Martinez suggests that social conflict in the border region is inevitable as the United States and Mexico integrate more fully: "As economic and cultural interaction intensifies, so do illicit cross-border activities such as drug trafficking and undocumented migration. Authorities are compelled to confront such illicit activities, but doing so inhibits economic and cultural interaction, negatively impacting the growing number of people economically dependent on trans-border trade. Economically dynamic borderlands . . . may face frictions associated with international trade, smuggling, undocumented migration, heavy cross-border traffic, and international pollution. Thus, while the emergence of interdependent borderlands has diminished traditional

strife related to location, it has not eliminated conflict. New disputes have been spawned by the intrinsic contradiction of maintaining border restrictions as the economies and societies of the two sides draw closer together."⁶⁴

While such conflict may be viewed as normal or routine in integrating borderlands generally, the situational context of U.S.-Mexico border dynamics poses additional problems in light of current U.S. immigration and drug interdiction policies; most notably, the emergence of irredentism. For example, measures the U.S. Border Patrol has taken to stem the flow of illegal immigration into the United States have raised human rights concerns in the United States and Mexico. A University of Texas at Houston study reports that more than 300 Latin American immigrants die along the border each year in Texas alone as a result of Operation Rio Grande. Here, Border Patrol agents are stationed 200 yards apart along a 2- to 3-mile section of the border near Brownsville, forcing immigrants farther into the more isolated and dangerous border regions to avoid arrest.⁶⁵ The Catholic Church has condemned U.S. border policies for their dismal implications for human rights, and Jose Angel Gurria Trevino, Mexico's Foreign Minister at the time, expressed his concern that the operation "criminalizes migration and migrants, whether they are documented or legal residents and [the policy] even [discriminates] against Americans of Mexican origin."⁶⁶

A similar program, Operation Gatekeeper, was launched in and around San Diego, California. It, too, has been criticized, with specific complaints regarding the deaths of 521 illegal border crossers in the San Diego area since 1994.⁶⁷ The operation included a 10-foot-high "iron curtain" that U.S. Army Reserve units erected around San Diego.⁶⁸ Graffiti on the steel barricade reads "Welcome to the new Berlin Wall." There are many cases of perceived Border Patrol and other law enforcement abuses along the border that indicate escalated social conflict in the region.⁶⁹ While these cases do not comprise a comprehensive list of such abuses, they do illustrate the scope of social tension that aggressive border enforcement efforts foster.

Some groups explicitly promote an irredentist platform of political independence for the southwestern United States to create a new state of Aztlán comprising territories in the southwestern United States and northern Mexico. . . . Measures the U.S. Border Patrol has taken to stem the flow of illegal immigration into the United States have raised human rights concerns in the United States and Mexico.

Meanwhile, Mexico has placed a national flag the length of a football field on the Mexican side of the El Paso-Ciudad Juárez frontier.⁷⁰ In a statement that demonstrates Mexico's irredentist concerns for Mexicans' human rights in the United States, former Mexican President Ernesto Zedillo said the flag "is a reminder that we are an independent nation ready to defend its people wherever they may be."⁷¹ The flag flies on a 26-story pole, six stories higher than any building in El Paso, Texas, and "can be seen miles to the east on Interstate 10 and to the north on U.S. 54."⁷² Fox has raised the issue anew with his recent pledge to seek better treatment for Mexican immigrants.⁷³ Other Mexican aspects of irredentism include Mexico's extending voting rights to second- and third-generation Mexican-Americans, Mexico's call for UN intervention in a case of posse violence in Arizona, and demands for greater law enforcement accountability and less militarization of the border in the United States.⁷⁴

On the U.S. side of the border, irredentist, separatist, and dissident groups increasingly find outlets for expressing their views on the Internet, an interesting example of technological innovation being used for political dissent.⁷⁵ Some groups explicitly promote an irredentist platform of political independence for the southwestern United States to create a new state of Aztlán comprising territories in the southwestern United States and northern Mexico. Similar goals are promoted by the Brown Berets and the Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán, organizations prominent on university campuses throughout the southwestern United States and beyond. Many of these organizations are outgrowths of 1960s and 1970s Mexican-American nationalism, the last period of intense social conflict and irredentist expression.⁷⁶

The potential for irredentism as a serious manifestation of intensifying social conflict in MexAmerica is undeniable given the historical and situational contexts of U.S.-Mexico border dynamics, trends toward greater economic and cultural integration, and state immigration and drug interdiction policies. Authors Kathleen Staudt and David Spener suggest that "the growth of transnational communities and diasporas seems to pose a substantial chal-

lenge to state authority."⁷⁷ McCarthy notes that "interdependence reduces any one nation's ability to regulate the system of flows or restrict their effects."⁷⁸ State attempts to regulate such flows across fixed international boundaries may become bound up in police actions, resulting in a siege mentality among borderland residents.⁷⁹ Irredentism offers a forum for political and cultural resistance to state control and is a dynamic process that underscores the fluidity of human interaction across space in contrast to prevailing notions of borders and nation-states as being spatially static.

That irredentist sentiment would arise in the Southwest is not surprising, for it is distinct from any other region in the United States. Indeed, what is different about irredentism in MexAmerica relative to traditional notions of irredentism is the unique interconnectedness of transnationalism and territory. What is often regarded as the periphery of two states is in fact the center of a transnational cultural hearth and the core of a culturally distinct transnational region. In MexAmerica, what is traditionally regarded as the periphery is increasingly the center, and the center is increasingly peripheral. Most of the population is Latino, the only minority group in the United States to comprise the majority population of a large, contiguous, geographic territory. The only other minority group in North America of significant size and population that forms a majority within its own sizable contiguous geographic region is the French-speaking Quebecois of Canada. Indeed, some have written of the Southwest as the United State's "Hispanic Quebec," in reference to Quebec's nearly successful referendum on independence in 1996.⁸⁰

But the national construct of Aztlán is uniquely different from the notion of a Hispanic Quebec. The juxtaposition of identities in MexAmerica, including Anglo, Mexican, and indigenous, has led to a single transnational identity that is potentially at odds with state identities on both sides of the border. MexAmerica is a unique and evolving region that is currently being transformed by powerful cultural, political, and economic processes where the potential for irredentism is clearly present even as the border region continues to integrate more fully. **MR**

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