

PASSWORD



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VOLUME 65, NO. 3

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CONTENTS

El Chamizal: An Unfinished Story 74
By Alana de Hinojosa

**Book Review: Doña Tules: Santa Fe's
Courtesan and Gambler** 125
By Joseph Seagrove

**Forget the Alamo: The Rise and Fall
of an American Myth** 128
By Charles H. Martin

Guidelines for Publication in Password 130

Board of Directors and Committees 131

Membership Form 132

Upcoming Events 132



ARTICLES APPEARING
IN THIS JOURNAL ARE
ABSTRACTED AND
INDEXED IN
**HISTORICAL
ABSTRACTS** and
**AMERICA: HISTORY
AND LIFE**

El Chamizal: An Unfinished Story

By Alana de Hinojosa

“For 96 years the United States and Mexico have fought over *un pedazo de tierra* consisting of 630-acres in what is now part of South El Paso, Texas, and which originally was part of Segundo Barrio.”¹

—Cleofas Calleros, “El Chamizal—¿Qué Es?” (1963)

When the late El Paso historian Cleofas Calleros self-published his 1963 pamphlet “El Chamizal—¿Qué Es?” he was trying to resolve two riddled, age-old questions: *What is el Chamizal, and where is it?* A disputed tract of land somewhere between El Paso, Texas, and Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, el Chamizal has been so long contested, so fraught with ambiguity, always too elusive to define and too puzzling to fully seize as a result of the meandering Río Grande that caused this conflict, that its exact size and location has remained a highly debatable obscurity more than a century. And yet, in his 1963 pamphlet Calleros obscures this mystery by telling a story where the United States and Mexico fought over *un pedazo de tierra* consisting of a neat 630 acres in South El Paso.² It was no coincidence, that his estimation for el Chamizal was the same figure announced that same year by the American and Mexican diplomats negotiating the Chamizal Treaty, which proposed to settle this dispute by ceding 630 acres in South El Paso to Cd. Juárez. As someone with its own record of wrestling with el Chamizal, Calleros saw in the Chamizal Treaty his opportunity to finally rid himself of this troublesome terrain—and therefore was willing to do whatever he could to secure the settlement. Such was his motivation when he went to write “El Chamizal—¿Qué Es?” His objective was twofold: first to convince his Spanish-speaking peers skeptical of the settlement’s 630 acre definition that el Chamizal was indeed as the settlement defined it, and secondly that returning these 630 acres would finally “open the door to progress” in the region.³ It would do so, the official messaging insisted, by putting the question of el Chamizal to rest once and for all.

Though Calleros’ role in helping to secure the Chamizal Treaty is seldom if at all discussed, he was absolutely formative in establishing the settlement’s official Chamizal story as the only Chamizal story. Throughout this essay, then, I trace and contextualize Calleros’ relationship with el Chamizal, his motivations to settle this conflict, and his role in the Chamizal Treaty within a much longer, coordinated colonial endeavor to obscure el Chamizal’s complex geography and bend social perceptions of it in service of dominant geographies. In turn, I show that the Chamizal

Treaty and its narrative of progress required a great deal of labor and ongoing modes of erasure to maintain. It also required, however, a great many storytellers—and Calleros is one of them. Thus, when Calleros wrote “El Chamizal—¿Qué Es?” he became part of a long line of historians, cartographers, politicians, power brokers, and urban planners who have sought to naturalize a particular historical geography of El Paso that is underwritten by the erasure of el Chamizal and the destruction of Mexican and Mexican American places/homes within this contested tract of land.⁴

Though “El Chamizal—¿Qué Es?” is no doubt one of the few comprehensive histories of the Chamizal dispute, it is also so fraught with omission that it inescapably bends the contested region to fit the needs of a dominant narrative intent on erasing and trivializing el Chamizal. For one, Calleros does not outright say in his pamphlet that the Chamizal Treaty contained very little of what historians and many long-standing residents in the El Paso-Cd. Juárez borderlands consider el Chamizal: that is, a much larger swath of land today covering both sides of the El Paso-Cd. Juárez border—including Chihuahuita, Segundo Barrio, and part of

downtown El Paso—that was once known in the 1800s as El Paso del Norte’s most northern district *Partido Chamizal*.⁵ Calleros also does not clarify that of the 630 acres promised to Mexico, only 173 of those acres consisted of Partido Chamizal. This was because 193 acres were that of the southern half of Mexico’s Cordova Island and another 264 acres consisted of land to the east of Cordova Island (known as the El Paso barrios of Cordova Gardens and El Jardin) that the state of Mexico never contested as part of el Chamizal, but which was included in the settlement to “make up” for the parts of el Chamizal that would remain north of the border.⁶ Worse still, not once did Calleros mention that 5,600 mostly Mexican American South El Paso residents would be displaced from the 630 acres

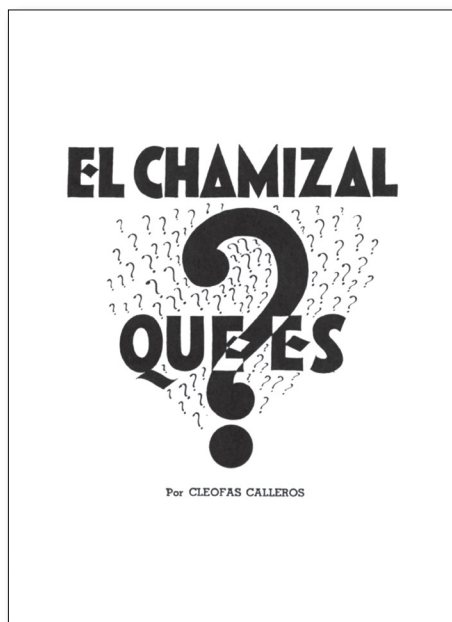


Figure 1. Source: Cleofas Calleros Papers, C.L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department, University of Texas at El Paso Library.

promised to Mexico or that their homes would be completely demolished in preparation for this exchange. If anything, his silence on this matter reflected the official messaging that spoke of these homes as blighted areas and maintained “their loss will be El Paso’s gain.”⁷

Such omissions to the Chamizal story were not lost on Mexicans south of the border who began publishing their own pamphlets on the Chamizal Treaty. In 1963, for instance, the city of Parral, Chihuahua, distributed 10,000 copies of a 15-page pamphlet titled “Mexico debe recuperar el

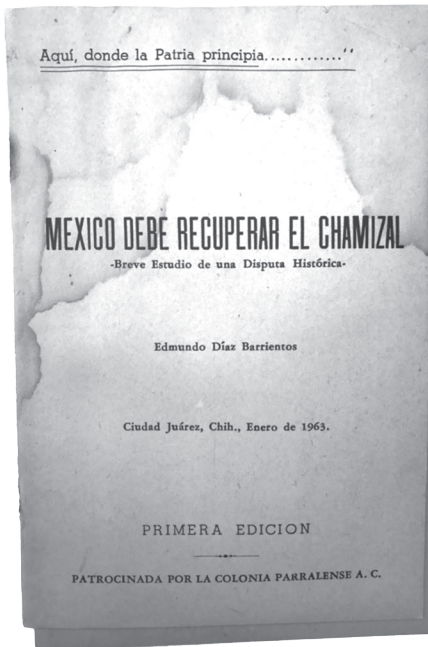


Figure 2. Source: Cleofas Calleros Papers, C.L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department, University of Texas at El Paso Library.

Chamizal.”⁸ Calleros, who just so happened to be visiting the mayor of Parral when copies of this pamphlet were delivered to the city, took this opportunity to discuss el Chamizal with the mayor and his administration and concluded that half of those he spoke to “were not too happy over the proposed settlement.”⁹ “Most of them expressed the feelings that ‘they were robbed,’ because they did not get the entire original Chamizal,” Calleros wrote in a letter to his friend, Joseph F. Friedkin, who was at that time the US Commissioner to the International Water and Boundary Commission (IWBC) tasked with carrying out the terms of the Chamizal Treaty. Not only did Calleros reject such ideas that the settlement robbed Mexico of the original el Chamizal, but he had made light of them in his own pamphlet by arguing that “[it] is humanly

impossible that every individual will be perfectly satisfied [by the Chamizal Treaty].” “For everyone to agree and be satisfied,” he insisted, “you would need a Chamizal for each one.”¹⁰

For those who really knew Calleros or who grew up with him in Segundo Barrio, this last remark must have been particularly striking. Not only did it belittle and deny the significance of peoples’ long-standing and complex experiences of el Chamizal, but it also trivialized Calleros’ own relationship to this contested tract of land—so much so that the Chamizal

story Calleros was most known for telling was missing entirely from “El Chamizal—¿Qué Es?”¹¹ Its absence was unmistakable, as this version of the Chamizal story was truly remarkable.

This story began on a Sunday in October of 1902. A six-year-old Cleofas Calleros and his mother, Refugio, had just arrived to Cd. Juárez.¹² They had come by way of the Mexican Central Railroad, third class, and had traveled nearly 500 miles from a town called Río Florido in Chihuahua, Mexico, that by the day’s end would be home in the past tense. Calleros’ father, Ismael, who was himself a refugee, was already across the border in El Paso where he was waiting for his wife and son in what would be their new home: a small *jacalito* between 7th and 8th Streets in Segundo Barrio. “And as we got off the train,” Calleros often narrated this part of the story, “my mother opened a letter of instructions which she had previously received in Chihuahua City giving us direction what to do to cross El Paso.”¹³ These instructions were in Ismael’s handwriting and read: “As you get off the train come to the Santa Fe bridge, walk and cross the river underneath the bridge, once you have crossed go to the end of the bridge and be admitted for entry to reside in El Paso.”¹⁴ Refugio did as her husband instructed, and crossed the Río Grande with her son out of sight from U.S. authorities and beneath the Santa Fe International Bridge where she and Calleros then walked to the immigration station, registered themselves as immigrants, and then made their way into Segundo Barrio. Even as a boy, the crossing seemed strange to Calleros. “Being six and a half years old, naturally my curiosity was aroused,” he recalled from that time nearly sixty years later.¹⁵ Even so, something told Calleros not to inquire about the nature of their crossing until it was safe to do so. But when he and his mother arrived shortly thereafter to their new home where Ismael was waiting for them, Calleros could no longer contain his curiosity. “Why did you tell mother to walk over the dry Río Grande, when there was such a nice bridge to cross from Mexico to the United States?” Calleros asked his father. “Mira hijito,” Ismael replied, “there is no reason why we Mexicans should pay un centavo to cross a bridge which is built on the Chamizal.”¹⁶

Calleros could not have known it then, but his father’s words would shape him and his perceptions of El Paso for the rest of his life. “This statement [from my father] caused me to ask many questions as to El Chamizal,” Calleros later explained.¹⁷ And as such, he committed his father’s words to memory, and repeated this Chamizal story over and over again; and with each repetition, the story would change him—and not in some neat, orderly, or contained way. Because in *this* version of el Chamizal, this contested tract of land was a subversive place beneath the Santa Fe International Bridge from which Calleros and his refugee family challenged and refused the United States’ colonial project of innate, impenetrable boundaries and



Figure 3. Sacred Heart School graduating class of 1911. Cleofas Calleros is pictured directly center in the back row. Source: Cleofas Calleros Papers, C.L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department, University of Texas at El Paso Library.

its cartographic rules for regulating the mobility of racialized difference. In this way, el Chamizal became a storied place of political struggle for Calleros and, in turn, his family's version of the Chamizal story became the one he is most known for telling. As an adult, it was the version he wrote in letters to his friends and colleagues and to local businessmen and politicians on both sides of the border. Often, he did so in the postscript like an epilogue noting the significance of el Chamizal on his family's immigration story and their sense of place and belonging in El Paso, as if to say: *This is how we arrived: with dignity and el Chamizal as our doorstep.*

It was likely difficult for Calleros to omit this story from "El Chamizal—¿Qué Es?" In doing so he forsook his family's regard toward el Chamizal for the sake of the Chamizal Treaty and its promise to put the question of el Chamizal to rest once and for all. And yet, the historical record also suggests that Calleros knew very well that putting this question to bed was a near-impossible task. As a boy, for instance, Calleros had quickly learned that everyone in Segundo Barrio seemed to have their own version of el Chamizal—and that each version was no less true than that of the others. When Calleros enrolled in Sacred Heart School as first grader, for instance, a boy in his class named Raymundo Santiago Garcia introduced himself by telling his own Chamizal story. In Raymundo's version, Sacred Heart School was built on el Chamizal: land, the boy explained, that had been

stolen from his father, Pedro Ignacio Garcia del Barrio, who was a Mexican lawyer from a prominent Cd. Juárez family and who, in 1866, inherited the 1818 Chamizal Spanish Land Grant located in Chihuahuita that became the leading case for the Chamizal dispute.¹⁸ When Father Carlos M. Pinto overheard Raymundo, he confirmed the boy's story, adding that when the church was built in 1892 residents in the area and some of his parishioners across the border protested that such "an elaborate brick building" was being built on el Chamizal.¹⁹ It wasn't long after this conversation that Calleros realized that while the question of el Chamizal's real location was always up for debate, "[i]t was common talk and knowledge [in Segundo Barrio] that everything south of Fifth street belonged to Mexico."²⁰ As he became older, however, and ventured beyond the racialized boundaries of Segundo Barrio, first as a student and later to wine and dine with El Paso's elite, he realized that Anglo El Pasoans had their own ideas for el Chamizal's whereabouts, too. At nineteen, when he purchased property in Segundo Barrio he also realized that "[a]ll property owners who have purchased property in South El Paso, south of First Street to the River since 1900, have been duly advised and warned that the Chamizal [...] clouds the title."²¹ These accumulated experiences positioned Calleros in such a way to realize that what everyone in El Paso seemed to know—but dare not admit—was that there was no easy, neat, or single answer to the questions, *What is el Chamizal, and where is it?* Because el Chamizal was not some passive, static place trivial to life in the city, but rather a storied, mysterious terrain that existed along various, distinct, sometimes overlapping—but always equally as real—lived, imagined, and disbelieved locations.

It is impossible to say why Calleros omitted these complex stories from his 1963 pamphlet, just as attempting to unravel who, if anyone, knows "the truth" about el Chamizal's whereabouts is an impossible task. But I have come to believe that Calleros omitted these stories because the settlement's 630 acre figure promised him the closure to the question of el Chamizal that he had sought for nearly his entire life. Consequently, and despite all of el Chamizal's integral relationship with El Paso, Calleros made a decision like many before him to consign this terrain to a trivial, marginal, and simplified past meant to distract us from what we were never supposed to know or remember about el Chamizal. But if we look closely, this carefully constructed past is fragile and susceptible to moments of fraying and unraveling. In what follows, then, I offer a discussion of space, place, and land different from other historical texts on El Paso that bypass the very site, its complexity, and the ongoing significance of el Chamizal in the making of this city, its social geography, and race and power relations in this region more broadly. In doing so, I demonstrate that el Chamizal

and the Chamizal Dispute are not as the official record—or Calleros for that matter—would like us to believe. Both, I am convinced, are much more complicated, still unfolding stories that are part of the fabric of El Paso and this region more broadly.

“Inability to lay the ghost of the Chamizal”

A resident of Segundo Barrio for more than 60 years, Calleros had keen understanding for how Anglo El Paso had exploited the riddled boundaries of el Chamizal to build and maintain the poverty-stricken, mostly Mexican immigrant barrio of the Second Ward that he called home. “For many the Chamizal’s murky status conveyed distinct advantages,” writes the historian Paul Kramer in his 2014 essay on the Chamizal Dispute.²² Over time, he explains, “it grew into a haven for slumlords seeking to extract the most rent from the most vulnerable with the least government oversight, and for business owners and city officials looking to install the slaughterhouses and garbage dumps that other neighborhoods had the power to stave off.”²³ The City of El Paso’s reluctance to make improvements or guarantee private loans in el Chamizal, together with landlords who refused to make repairs or upgrade their property on the grounds that their titles might be called into question, is rooted in an established relationship between Anglo El Paso and urban planning that is designed to produce these uneven socio-spatial relations and maintain the barrio’s stigmatized lower rank within the city’s social geography.²⁴ This relationship dates back to the end of the 19th century when the nascent settler community of Anglo El Paso violently dispossessed Partido Chamizal landholders and tenants and demolished their homes and farmlands. As I will show later in this essay, this coordinated destruction of Partido Chamizal coupled with the exploitation of el Chamizal’s riddled boundaries laid the groundwork for producing El Paso’s dilapidated, poverty-stricken Mexican barrios of the First and Second Wards. To Anglo Americans, however, the structural decay and filth of these wards were “proof” that Chihuahuita and Segundo Barrio were inherently inferior to their Anglo American counterpart north of the “Tortilla Curtain”—a derogatory term for South El Paso’s most northern boundary Paisano Drive.²⁵ These seemingly neutral but racist forms of social description coded in language of decay and filth reinforced these uneven spaces in a racist self-fulfilling prophecy. Not only did it justify discriminatory policies, infrastructural crises, and landlord neglect, but it also simultaneously denied the deliberation production of “the barrio.”²⁶ Such processes illuminate for us how race and “the barrio” are produced through space, how racism is spatialized through public policy and neglect, and ultimately “how social relations take on their full force and meaning when they are enacted physically in actual place.”²⁷

As someone who was well connected, Calleros was well aware that those living north of Paisano Drive regarded the First and Second Wards as a “blighted area calling for a solution.”²⁸ As someone who grown up in these conditions, he, too, wanted to resolve the problems of South El Paso. As a civic activist, he therefore made reallocating city resources to the barrio his life’s work by advocating for better living conditions and critiquing landlords for neglecting their properties and tenants on account of their contested property titles within el Chamizal. As a social worker and moderate liberal, however, Calleros also believed in the power of government to solve these problems and that working within the political system was the only viable avenue to promote change in the Second Ward.²⁹ Beginning in the 1920s, then, a twenty-something-year-old Calleros decided that if these problems were ever to be resolved, the slums themselves would need to be dealt with. Consequently, he became involved in numerous activities to clear slums in the Second Ward and at some point even seemed to adopt the racist moderate language toward slums when he described them as “constantly creating ‘bad citizens.’”³⁰ Later, in the 1930s, after years of establishing himself as someone deeply committed to these issues, Calleros headed a slum clearance program in Chihuahuita as the chairman of El Paso’s Federal Housing Authority. “Having lived a tenement for ten years, I could really appreciate what better housing meant to so many unfortunates,” he later said of his qualifications for the position.³¹ “As a matter of record,” however, “the fact is that it was a hard and thankless job.” Though Calleros did not outright say why his time as chairman was so difficult, newspaper coverage suggests that it may have had something to do with el Chamizal.³² In 1937, for instance, the *El Paso Times* ran a story with the headline “Persons Born in Chamizal Zone May Be Citizens of Two Countries,” which suggested that because no one knew where el Chamizal began and ended, the boundaries of US citizenship were not as concrete as they seemed.³³ El Paso officials labored ceaselessly to nullify this wrinkle to US sovereignty. Three years later, they tried to survey and map el Chamizal with the added objective of implementing the South El Paso slum clearance program that Calleros was part of. But “[t]he inability of American and Mexican officials to lay the ghost of the Chamizal,” summarized the *El Paso Times*, “barred the slum clearance program from the area, as governmental regulations prohibit federal participation where ownership is in question.”³⁴ This poetic justice—that the same subversive terrain through which Calleros and his mother crossed into El Paso nearly thirty years prior was also now, in the 1930s, disrupting the spatial entitlements of US citizenship and slum clearance programs—was likely not lost on Calleros. As chairman of the FHA, however, he was no longer in a position to admire the power of el Chamizal. In fact, he was now in position where disdain for this troublesome terrain was expected of him—as it was precisely the ghost of el Chamizal

that not only blazoned this terrain's right to remain unknowable in ways that were self-determined, but which devastated his slum clearance vision for Chihuahuita.³⁵

It was likely around this time, then, that Calleros' relationship with el Chamizal began to sour. His determination to lay the ghost of el Chamizal would therefore not have surprised those who knew him. As a public figure both north and south of Paisano Drive, even strangers knew enough about Calleros to describe him as someone deeply resentful of injustice as he saw it. Nearly 30 years later, then, when President John F. Kennedy publicly committed to the state and people of Mexico in 1963 that the United States would finally return el Chamizal, it is likely Calleros believed that this was his chance to finally absolve himself of Chamizal's injustice. And if Calleros, nearing his 70th birthday, was focused on his legacy in the Second Ward, perhaps he also believed that if he played his part in rewriting the complex history of the Chamizal Dispute according to the needs to the Chamizal Treaty, not only would the settlement be his means to an engineered end, but perhaps he would also be remembered as the champion of the Second Ward who helped to eliminate the ghost of el Chamizal and bring long overdue progress to the place he called home.

Bending el Chamizal

Calleros' 1963 pamphlet "El Chamizal—¿Qué Es?" is perhaps the earliest reference to how historians of the El Paso-Cd. Juarez borderlands explained away the mystery and complexity of el Chamizal in order to naturalize the Chamizal Treaty's narrative of closure and progress. This dominant narrative, however, is only possible by first concealing el Chamizal's complex geography due to "the Río Grande's stubborn tendency to meander" and secondly bending this terrain to fit the settlement's intelligible unit of 630 acres.³⁶ Indeed, though U.S. and Mexican state accounts maintain that the Chamizal dispute began with a single shift in the Río Grande in the year of 1864, I argue that archival records, local and binational maps, and regional testimonies tell a more complicated story: one where el Chamizal was the consequence of multiple meanderings across Partido Chamizal in the years of 1848, 1852, 1858, 1862, 1864, 1865, 1868, 1873, 1883, 1895, 1897 and through the early 1900s.³⁷ As a result of these meanderings, this growing disputed area became regionally known as "el Chamizal" or the "Chamizal Zone," and its size remains highly contested and perhaps impossible to define due to the limited, cursory, and absent documentation for this ever-shifting river.

In the last 150 years alone, there have been so many estimations for el Chamizal that it is hard to believe any single one that purports to have wholly identified this tract of land. In the nascent settler community of El

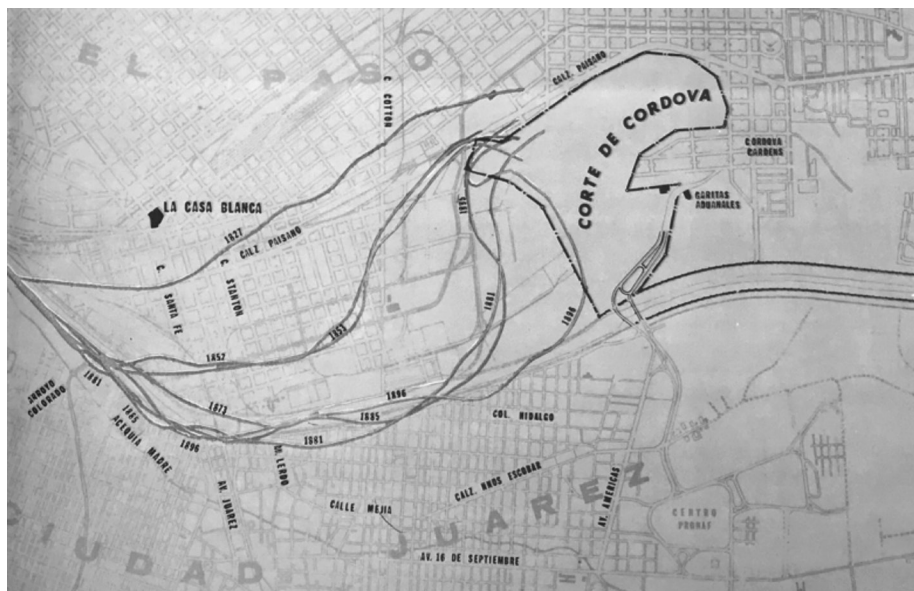


Figure 4. Mexican map showing the *Río Grande*'s meandering, known locations across *el Chamizal* from 1827 to 1896. Source: *El Chamizal, solución complete: Album gráfico*, by M. Quesada Brandi.

Paso, some historians claim that *el Chamizal* comprised one-fourth of the city.³⁸ The renowned borderlands historian Leon Metz once suggested *el Chamizal* consisted of 1,200 acres and Gladys Gregory, another well-known El Paso historian, claimed about 100 of these acres fell within El Paso's business district.³⁹ In the 1950s, however, U.S. federal documents identified *el Chamizal* as a much smaller swatch a land: a total of 590 acres.⁴⁰ Even Calleros had his own fluctuating ideas for *el Chamizal*'s whereabouts. Often, he claimed *el Chamizal* began at San Antonio Street and extended as far south as Cd. Juárez's Calle de Mejía—once known by its former name Calle del Chamizal.⁴¹ In his 1954 book *El Paso—Then and Now*, Calleros also identified the intersection of Mesa Avenue and Sixth Street as the center of the Chamizal Zone.⁴² By 1963, however, Calleros had fully committed to the settlement's 630 acre definition. He said as much when he wrote to concerned Segundo Barrio resident insisting that while [t]here was once a map that existed in Ciudad Juárez that said Mexico claimed all land south of First Street [...]this is officially incorrect. The line in consideration begins at 10th Street."⁴³ But even this official rendition for *el Chamizal* was susceptible to fraying and unraveling. Thirty years later, for instance, Nestor Valencia, who served as El Paso's Chamizal Project Director from 1964 to 1969, suggested in an interview that *el Chamizal*'s

size and location has never been fully known, never wholly certain in the local spatial imaginary.⁴⁴ Though Valencia was admittedly skeptical, in order to explain what he meant by this, he referenced his childhood: how as a boy his parents often told stories to him and his siblings of a vast and seemingly immeasurable parcel of Mexican territory called “el Chamizal” that enveloped all of El Paso and extended into the lower valley all the way to his family home downriver in the neighborhood of Ysleta. “I think there was exaggeration at home,” he began, before continuing, “My parents thought that the Chamizal was a much more extensive area that we owed Mexico. They believed that it covered practically all of El Paso and half of the Valley. And so, everything was Chamizal to them.”⁴⁵

Stories like Valencia’s, which suggest that el Chamizal is not as the settlement defined it, are unacceptable within the logics of the dominant narrative that insists to have wholly identified el Chamizal and expelled it from El Paso. Part of how this dominant story operates is through U.S. logics of conquest and colonialism where Anglo American domination derives from an incessant drive to overcome difficult environments and discipline them into coherent, submissive terrains in service of the nation-state. In his historical and environmental analysis of U.S. westward expansion, Donald Worster argues that Anglo American settlers sought not simply to master the arid regions of the U.S. Southwest through irrigation technologies, but to reshape them entirely into “rivers of empire.”⁴⁶ Through the construction of canals, levees, and dams, Worster says these westbound settlers engaged in a process of self-making by brutally inscribing reason and capitalism onto the landscape in ways that naturalized uneven social relations of dominance between Anglo Americans, land, and diverse non-white peoples racialized as mere extensions of the land’s savageness. Along this frontier, this process of self-making through violence—or what the historian Richard Slotkin calls the “myth of regeneration through violence”—underwrites the U.S. colonial empire and its citizen subjectivity.⁴⁷ Violence, Slotkin explains, was not only the means through which Anglo American settlers defined the frontier, national aspiration, and self-determination, but was also the method through which these settlers understood themselves to be coherent, dominant subjects. In El Paso, I argue that we can see similar logics in the Chamizal Treaty’s insistence that the Río Grande was inferior, could be beaten into total submission, and fixed “in its proper place” along a redrawn canal between El Paso and Cd. Juárez. Such regard toward this river is rooted in the myth of regeneration through violence and its colonial refusal to be in relation with geography.⁴⁸ Such roots, however, are also indicative of “an epidemic of blindness.”⁴⁹ “In his raging, uncontrolled drive for self-preservation and self-extension,” writes Worster, “the dominator loses sight of the very ends of life.”⁵⁰ We can see this blindness in that “much of the Rio Grande today is little more than a magnificently engineered

pipe—diverted, straightened, dammed, bled by canals, linked by tunnel to the Colorado River basin in the north, surrendering its last trickle in the south to a ditch that supplies farmers near El Paso.”⁵¹

It mattered little to these settlers that the Río Grande was a protagonist in this region of the world who since time immemorial brought life and environmental balance to the region by reshaping the landscape according to its own needs and desires. Nor did it matter that Native communities living along this river’s floodplain tended to and lived in relation with the Río Grande’s perpetually changing landscape for just as long.⁵² These Native stewards understand that while this river was rarely—if ever—exactly as it had been the year before, it was not an erratic object that moved without reason, but rather a living thing who moved according to necessary seasonal rhythms that the land and life depended on. During most of the winter and early spring months, for instance, the river remained dry and dormant; but when summer arrived, and as the Colorado mountain snows melted, the Río Grande would swell in size, flood, and meander. Its tendency to overwhelm its width, open up new bending, ribbon-like channels and sometimes abandon older channels altogether were its defining features.

While environmental historians of the US Southwest have noted the Río Grande’s distinctive characteristics, very few have recognized that its ever-changing quality was especially true within el Chamizal where a combination of the river slowing down in the lower valley of what is now El Paso and depositing sediment there had built up an extensive alluvial plain over which the river wandered at will. “It is almost needless to demonstrate,” reads a 1911 report on el Chamizal, “that the River Bravo is inconstant and mutable—especially so at the region of the disputed land—since it is a fact evident to everybody.”⁵³ Before flood control measures upriver, the months of May, June, and July brought with them such mercurial deluges that the river at el Chamizal would shift back and forth along a four- to six-mile alluvial plain that had developed over centuries of accumulative meanderings. And though flood control measures upriver established in the early 20th century reduced these meanderings through el Chamizal, the Río Grande through this area remained mostly untouched by irrigation technologies through most of the century.⁵⁴ Like the slum clearance programs of the 1930s, this was largely because the ghost of el Chamizal prevented such technologies from altering the bed of the river. As such, when the Rio Grande Rectification Project of the same decades, which was designed to straighten and stabilize the Río Grande along the Texas-Mexico border, was implemented downriver, the Río Grande through el Chamizal was excluded from the program. In turn, rhetoric developed among Anglo El Pasoans that insisted el Chamizal and the Río Grande were an intertwined, corrupt force in need of correction if “democracy” and “progress” were ever to grace the region.

Historical texts on the Chamizal Dispute tend to operate within this white colonial spatial imaginary and its disdain for a river that “refused to remain still.”⁵⁵ In a short essay on the Chamizal dispute published in a 1963 issue of *Password*, Gladys Gregory argued the Río Grande was mad like “the witches in Macbeth” for having “brewed an evil influence destined to defeat the best of human intentions.”⁵⁶ In rendering the river this way, the historical literature not only reduces the Río Grande into an erratic thing who behaves according to the “caprices of nature,” but which also replicates scripts of the frontier that tie indigeneity to a savage wilderness and whiteness to rationality.⁵⁷ This discourse reflects the larger colonial context from which the Chamizal Treaty emerged, as the settlement’s unspoken objective was to discipline this unruly, savage terrain to prevent any future boundary disputes. To do this, the writers of the Chamizal Treaty announced after the 630 acres was ceded to Mexico the Río Grande would be fixed along a redrawn, canalized boundary between El Paso and Cd. Juárez. As the *New York Times* put it in 1967, “The Río Grande [was] rerouted to conform to this transfer and its new channel is being lined with concrete to prevent future waywardness.”⁵⁸ By proposing that a canal be carved out of the land to straighten and redirect the Río Grande, the writers of the Chamizal Treaty sought not simply to solidify settler domination over this land, but more than this to foreclose any imagining of this river’s unruliness or the mystery of el Chamizal.

As historians of the US-Mexico border have argued, disciplining the Río Grande in service of dominant geographies can be traced back to the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo that established the Río Grande as the US-Mexico boundary. While the writers of the 1848 treaty had anticipated at least in part the challenges of establishing this boundary at the river, they nonetheless assumed they could outwit it. Article V of the Treaty, for instance, specifies that the U.S.-Mexico boundary is a fixed thing: a line following the middle of the river’s channel. Aware that the Río Grande often had multiple channels, the writers stipulated that the deepest channel marks the “real” boundary.⁵⁹ Having assumed that this logic settled any future confusion over the boundary’s exact location, they declared the boundary would be surveyed and mapped by a binational boundary commission with “due precision” and thereafter “no change shall ever be made [...] except by the express and free consent of both nations.”⁶⁰ This declaration was couched in what the historian Raymond B. Craib has called “state fixations:” narrative and cartographic projects of state formation that impose structures of fixity and rationality onto land.⁶¹ The marking and plotting required to enact state fixations, he argues, are “never technical procedures distinct from a social and political context.”⁶² Indeed, along the US-Mexico boundary, delineating this geopolitical border was seeped in a colonial endeavor to reflect Anglo America’s drive

to bend the Río Grande into a river of empire and, in turn, inscribe onto the land a new racial hierarchy and its geopolitical boundaries/borders for who belonged in America and who did not.

From the beginning, however, the 1852 binational boundary commission tasked with surveying the Texas-Mexico boundary struggled to enact the treaty's proclaimed precision, permanence, and promise that Anglo Americans were separate from and dominant over land.⁶³ When the boundary commission arrived at El Paso del Norte in 1850, for instance, they realized that the Río Grande was not a passive, predictable, or lifeless mass upon which they could easily impose their state fixations. In some cases, William H. Emory, the U.S. appointed surveyor, reported that he and his Mexican counterpart, Jose Salazar, often had no idea where to place the border because there was no visible channel.⁶⁴ Only until heavy rains arrived and "revealed" the boundary were they able to complete their task. So persistent was this ever-shifting terrain and so fraught was the boundary commission with inaccurate instrumentation and cursory procedures that the U.S. and Mexican commissioners sometimes mapped entirely different locations for the international boundary.⁶⁵ In 1854, a discrepancy between the U.S. and Mexican maps depicting the location of El Paso del Norte and the 1852 course of the Río Grande through this region fueled U.S. territorial claims—culminating in the 1854 Gadsden Purchase.⁶⁶ While this discrepancy and its connection to the Gadsden Purchase has been widely documented by historians, its connection to the Chamizal Dispute is rarely addressed. As result, far less known about this discrepancy is its role in fueling both U.S. and Mexican territorial claims to el Chamizal.⁶⁷ Although the two maps—known as U.S. and Mexican Maps No. 29—were drawn up when the joint commission finished their surveying of the boundary through El Paso del Norte in 1852, they were not officially completed until after the ratification of the Treaty of 1854 that solidified the Gadsden Purchase. These maps showed the boundary through El Paso del Norte as following the middle of the river moving westward from the Río Grande as defined by the 1854 Treaty. However, Emory's Map No. 29 and Salazar's depicted different locations for the middle of this river. Worse still, Salazar's signature—the very thing that rendered the U.S. map legitimate—had been erased from Emory's Map No. 29.⁶⁸ Salazar's map, on the other hand, had both signatures and thus was the only legally sound map of the two.⁶⁹ A formal note written on Emory's map explained this discrepancy—stating that the U.S. and Mexican maps agreed with another "except in the bed of the River, which circumstance is the consequence of the two Surveys being made at different periods, six months apart, during which time the River changed its bed, as it is constantly doing, but always within narrow limits."⁷⁰ An attempt by Emory to diminish the significance of this discrepancy, he could not fully conceal the complicated, unspoken

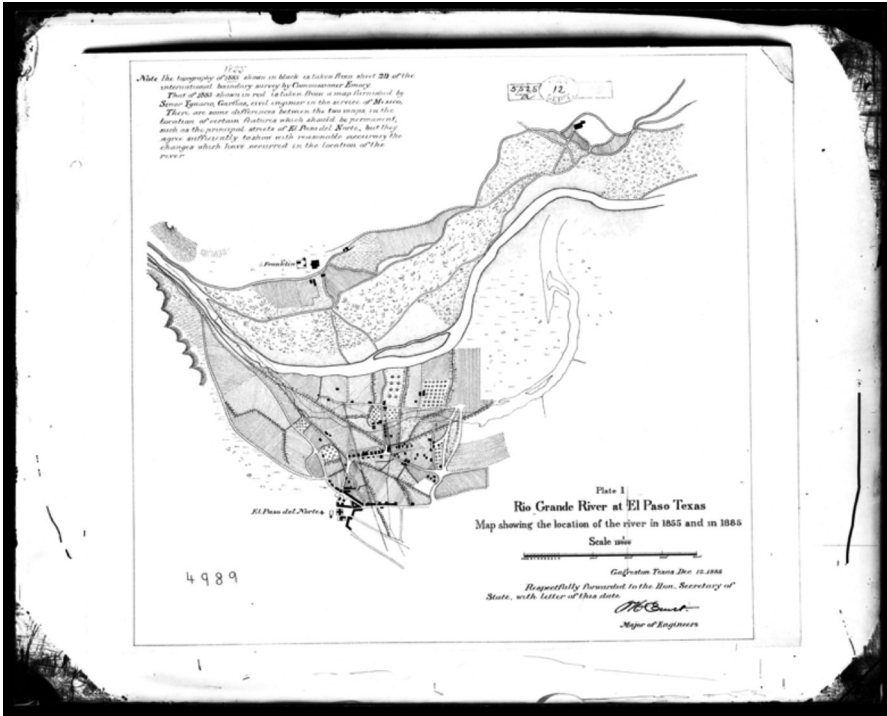


Figure 5. Map showing the location of the river in 1855 and 1885. The topography shown in this map is taken from Map 29 of the international boundary survey by Emory. The southern river channel shown in this map is taken from an 1885 map made by Ygnacio Garfias, a civil engineer, in service of Mexico. Source: Smithsonian Institution Archives

truth of the matter: that the Río Grande had evaded their cartographic control, ruptured any pretense of scientific accuracy and objectivity, and ultimately exposed the fantasy of their state fixations.⁷¹

But even contemporary maps of el Chamizal illuminate how state fixations require obscuring the Río Grande's meanderings in order to represent a coherent geography between El Paso and Cd. Juárez. Indeed, of the many maps that depict the river's shifts across el Chamizal, few—if any—represent just how often the river rearranged itself across this landscape. Though maps produced by the Mexican state tend to represent more meanderings, American maps typically externalize and restrain this terrain by representing only those localities officially surveyed and colonially legible.⁷² What's striking, then, about these American maps is what they conceal and obscure: that is, the frequency that this river intervened in this region's geographic knowability and, in turn, el

Chamizal's riddled boundaries. This concealing and obscuring are

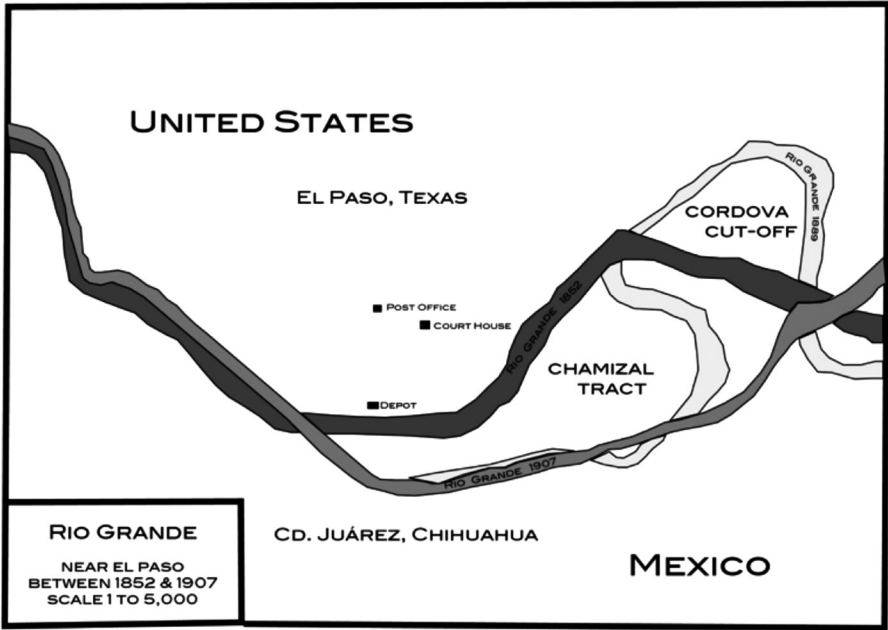


Figure 6. A common U.S. Map of El Chamizal that depicts minimal meanderings. Source: "The Rio Grande Boundary Dispute in American Diplomacy" by Donald W. Peters, published in *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*. Credit: Alana de Hinojosa.

indicative of what the geographer Kathleen Kirby describes as cartography's dual purpose: "the externalization and control" of geography as the means to produce the "safely encapsulated" White rational subject.⁷³ From this perspective, "the mapper should be able to 'master' his environment," to produce colonized terrains that not only serve colonial desires and needs, but moreover position the White subject in a "secure and superior position in relation to [geography], without it affecting him in turn."⁷⁴ In other words, Kirby explains, the cartographer must conceal the great pains he takes to convince himself that he and geography are not "integrally involved."⁷⁵ Contemporary of American maps of el Chamizal—like Calleros' 1963 pamphlet—similarly seek to represent a world where El Paso and el Chamizal are not fundamentally involved. In fact, like the cartographers and surveyors of el Chamizal that came before him, when writing "El Chamizal—¿Qué Es?" Calleros not only obscured el Chamizal's complex geography took, but he took great pains to convince himself that he and el Chamizal are not integrally involved. In doing so, he sought to naturalize a canonized historical geography of El Paso underwritten by el Chamizal's erasure and denial.⁷⁶

El Chamizal & the Built-in Imperfections of the US-Mexico Border

For all Emory and Salazar had learned about the Río Grande, when they completed their survey of the international boundary in 1856, they declared that the 52 rock monuments they had built through the middle of the river stood as testaments to its permanence. This was a performative declaration indicative of a delusional refusal to admit what all surveyors and cartographers of the US-Mexico boundary knew to be true: that “state fixations all too often ended up as state frustrations. On the ground, fantasies of fixity ran aground.”⁷⁷ Indeed, by 1882, when a resurvey commission was dispatched to the southern border, it found that nearly all the monuments had been toppled.⁷⁸ While some in the U.S. government focused on repairing the boundary monuments as the primary means through which to restore the border’s sanctity, others became increasingly aware of a more pressing dilemma: a meandering Río Grande in which the river’s deepest channel wandered from the boundary’s surveyed location.

The very same year Emory and Salazar wrote their final reports, one of El Paso’s earliest Anglo-American settlers, James Wiley Magoffin, wrote an “anxious inquiry” to the U.S. government concerning a change in the Río Grande’s deepest channel.⁷⁹ The letter was forwarded to the U.S. Attorney General Caleb Cushing who, after reviewing the 1848 Treaty and consulting international law on fluvial boundaries, submitted a response that directly contradicted the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. In his written opinion, Cushing began by saying that the writers of the 1848 Treaty had been correct when they declared the boundary between the United States and Mexico was to be forever that described by the 1848 Treaty and 1852 bi-national survey. However, he continued, “if [the boundary] need modification to give it absolute exactness” then changes in the boundary were to be allotted for provided that such changes be through the “gradual change of a river-course by insensible accretion” and not by the sudden abandonment of an existing riverbed for another one entirely.⁸⁰ Cushing’s opinion, in other words, stipulated that if the river’s course changed *slowly* through erosion—a process called accretion—the boundary moved *with* the river.⁸¹ However, if the river’s course changed *suddenly* by abandoning its channel for another one entirely—a process called avulsion—the boundary remained along its 1852 demarcation. In effect, Cushing’s opinion applied what is known as the law of accretion: an international legal principle that automatically affords ownership to the landowner of an opposite riverbank property when a river-boundary slowly moves to such a degree that it gradually transfers land from one side of the riverbank to the other.⁸² As U.S. common law states, the law is a “universal rule”—both “ancient and modern”—that protects a landowner’s entitlement to future accretion lands

as a “vested right” that is part of his “aleatory contract with nature.”⁸³ In this way, the law of accretion is a notable legal framework within U.S. property law and colonial ideology, as it is one of the unusual instances in which nature is not corrupt or in need of White manipulation to adhere it to projects of rationality, capital, and property—but in fact fosters them. At the same time, however, rationales for the law of accretion, also firmly work within colonial logics and theories of productivity.⁸⁴ According to these rationales, when accretion lands attach to a landholder’s property, he is considered to be in a better position than anyone else to exploit the land—and thus is the righteous owner of said lands. Because theories of productivity have long been a conceptual tool for the dispossession of racialized non-white subjects, the law of the accretion is simultaneously a colonial oddity and part of an established colonial toolkit for dispossession.

Though at the time of Cushing’s opinion there was already evidence that the Río Grande was shifting southward into El Paso del Norte and thereby “transferring” land north of the river, it is impossible to say if Cushing knew of this evidence or if it factored into his opinion. During the following decade, however, the Río Grande dramatically flooded through this region. These floods caused meanders that were a combination of abandoned avulsions, erosions, and accretion at rates that were often rapid, imperceptible, and indistinguishable.⁸⁵ Even so, the unspoken implication of Cushing’s opinion was heard loud and clear by Anglo American settlers arriving to the region: that is, that the U.S.-Mexico boundary was not fixed in place, but rather could be redrawn according to their “aleatory contract with nature.” Though Cushing’s 1856 opinion did not have the status of a formal inter-governmental agreement for settling river-boundary disputes until nearly 30 years later with the ratification of the Treaty of 1884—in which the United States and Mexico officially agreed to the law of the accretion—his opinion provided the legal infrastructure for what the historian Oscar Martinez has elsewhere described as the “built-in imperfections” of the U.S.-Mexico boundary.⁸⁶ Perhaps Cushing did not know that his opinion would offer Anglo American settlers the language, narrative framework, and legal reasoning through which to rationalize and assert their legitimate possession of el Chamizal. But through the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth, the law of accretion emboldened Anglo American claims to el Chamizal.⁸⁷

The law of accretion, el Chamizal, & the making of El Paso

What few historians of El Paso seem to realize or perhaps dare to admit is that the making of El Paso, Texas, is inescapably wrapped up in the meandering Río Grande, the law of accretion, and el Chamizal. Instead, so often do historians credit the 1827 Juan Maria Ponce de Leon Land Grant



Figure 7, Figure 8. Photos of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway roundhouse and freight house in El Paso, Texas. These structures were built in 1881 within the Chamizal Land Grant. Photos were taken in 1931. Source: Kansas Historical Society.

as El Paso's origin-story or narrate the arrival of railroads in the 1880s as El Paso's real kickoff, that historians often underestimate or completely overlook the relevance and the complexity of el Chamizal in the origin and making of El Paso, Texas, and power relations in the region more broadly.

Though the canon historiography typically separates the story of el Chamizal and from that of the Ponce de Leon Grant, they are in fact braided together so tightly that you cannot untwist them. The Ponce de Leon Grant has been narrated as El Paso's cherished origin story for as long as El Paso has existed. This is because El Paso's original townsite and present-day business district are located on this land grant. As such, "[t]he growth and expansion of this metropolitan city is intimately related to the development and improvement of the Ponce de Leon Grant," writes the historian J.J. Bowden in his 1971 book *Spanish and Mexican Land Grants in the Chihuahuan Acquisition*.⁸⁸ Though Bowden makes no mention of el Chamizal in this entry on his Ponce de Leon Grant, his map of the 1827 property labels the southern third of the Ponce de Leon Grant as "Chamizal Zone." Like most historical accounts, how this part of el Chamizal came to fall within the boundaries of the Ponce de Leon Grant goes unsaid. But the historical record indicates it has to with the law of accretion.

At its founding in 1827, the Ponce de Leon Grant was a 215 acre property directly north of the Río Grande in the Mexican city of El Paso del Norte.⁸⁹ In 1830, however, a flood in the river washed away Ponce de Leon's adobe house and shifted 200 acres previously south of the river, north. Once the flood waters subsided, Ponce de Leon not only built a new home where the Anson Mills building in downtown El Paso stands today, but he also sought compensation for the flood damage to this property by petitioning the Ayuntamiento of El Paso del Norte for additional grant land.⁹⁰ The Ayuntamiento appointed a committee to investigate the merits of Ponce de Leon's request and based on the findings of this report, Bowden explains, "the Ayuntamiento granted Ponce de León the accretion lands lying north of the Río Grande."⁹¹ This, in turn, nearly doubled Ponce de Leon's land holding. Thirty years later, in 1859, when Anson Mills, who was then the Deputy Surveyor of the newly declared City of El Paso, surveyed the Ponce de Leon Grant as an American settlement, his map showed an additional 38 acre increase to the property by what Mills described as accretion lands.⁹² In 1887, the State of Texas did the same when it applied the law of accretion to add an additional 200-acres to the Ponce de Leon Grant—including parts of Partido Chamizal—after an American land speculator named Robert Campbell and his Campbell Real Estate Company petitioned to develop 600 acres of the former Ponce de Leon Grant into the Campbell Addition to the City of El Paso.⁹³ That the Ponce de Leon Grant came to include parts of el Chamizal through the law of accretion is therefore a historical fact that has largely gone unspoken in the canon of El Paso

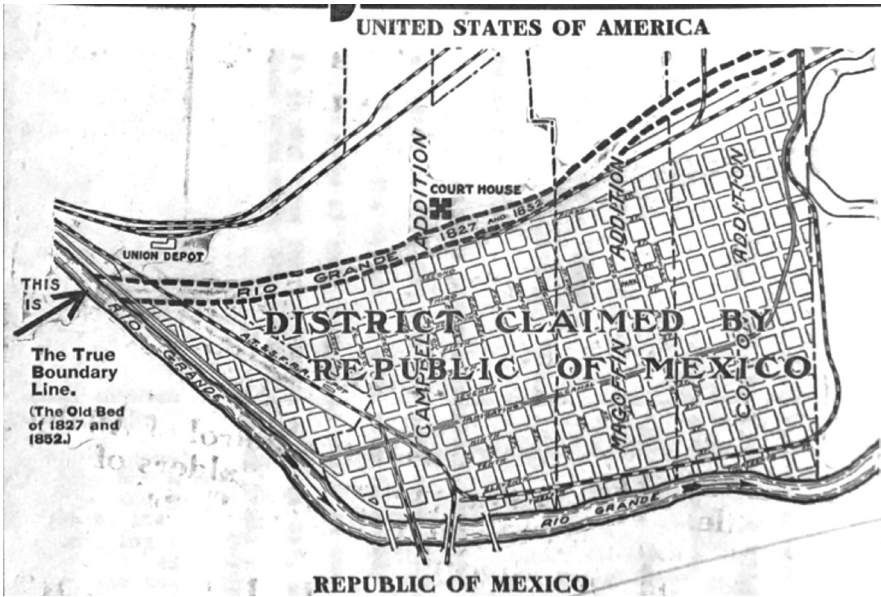


Figure 9. Map of Partido Chamizal. Source: Chamizal Title Company Papers, Arizona Historical Society.

history. But if historians of El Paso agree that the Ponce de Leon Grant is this city's origin-story, so too is el Chamizal, the law of accretion, and the meandering Río Grande.

This integral relationship between the law of accretion, el Chamizal, and El Paso is further obscured by trivializing and omitting the story of the Chamizal Spanish Land Grant where Chihuahuita is located presently. While in 1852 the Chamizal Grant was firmly south of the international boundary in El Paso del Norte, southward shifts by the Río Grande and extraordinary floods through the 1860s placed this land grant and most of Partido Chamizal north of the river. In 1866, Pedro Ignacio Garcia del Barrio inherited this land grant from his grandfather, Lorenzo del Barrio, and began tending to the ranch house and tenant farmers who lived on the property. Though Lorenzo del Barrio's claim to the Chamizal Grant dated to 1827, the property itself dated back to 1818 when the Spanish Crown granted the Chamizal Grant as a communal *edjio* to four Spanish citizens in the region: Felix Miranda, his wife Ursula Miranda, Jose Antonio Apodaca, and Ricardo Brusuelas.⁹⁴ For reasons that are not entirely clear, but which result in further erasing el Chamizal from the canon of El Paso history, historians tend to gloss over the role of the Garcia del Barrio family in Chihuahuita's history. Instead, they often credit Brusuelas for developing the prosperous ranch that became, in 1885, El Paso's First Ward.⁹⁵



Figure 10. Map of el Chamizal showing the Cotton, Magoffin, and Campbell Additions to the City of El Paso. Source: Chamizal Title Company Papers, Arizona Historical Society.

That Brusuelas is most often associated with Chihuahuita's origin when he and his co-owners operated this ejido ranch for less than ten years warrants our attention because it is a common historical citation that not only marginalizes the Garcia del Barrio family from the First Ward's history, but actively undermines the more than 50 years of that the Garcia del Barrio family tended to the ranch and maintained their possession of the property until the arrival of the

Aitchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad in 1881. That year, when builders for this railroad began their construction through the Chamizal Grant, railroad representatives fielded Garcia del Barrio's protests by arguing that the area was open for American settlement under the law of accretion.⁹⁶ A lawyer himself, it was Garcia del Barrio's conviction that the law of accretion did not apply to his property that anchored him as he continued to cross the river from El Paso del Norte to manage what was left of his crops and tenants. "I protested repeatedly the unceremonious and violent manner in which my property was taken from me," Garcia del Barrio recalled nearly 25 years later.⁹⁷ Eventually, however, where fruit trees, grape vines, and his ranch house once stood, the Santa Fe Freight House was built in their place.

When Garcia del Barrio asked the Ayuntamiento of the City of El Paso del Norte to intervene on his behalf, the Ayuntamiento issued a letter on

June 13, 1881, that condemned the activities of the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad by name and demanded clarification on the international boundary's location.⁹⁸ Though nothing came of the letter, Garcia del Barrio continued to cross the river and began organizing with the other Partido Chamizal residents whose land had also shifted north of the river. When President Benito Juarez came to El Paso del Norte in 1885, Garcia arranged a meeting between him and the claimants of Partido Chamizal. As a result of this meeting "a letter of concern" was sent to Washington D.C.; but because no branch of the U.S. government existed at that time to explicitly deal with international boundary disputes, nothing more than an acknowledgement of the need to clarify the definition of the international boundary came of it.⁹⁹

Meanwhile, Anglo American land speculators who had timed their business plans with the railroad's arrival to El Paso had already determined that the law of accretion rendered Anglo American possession of el Chamizal legitimate. With this legal framework at their disposal, these speculators imposed a new urban blueprint atop Partido Chamizal's extensive ranch and agricultural community. They surveyed streets, alleys, and lots and sold these lots to Anglo American settlers as part of three residential subdivisions to the City of El Paso: the Cotton Addition settled by Frank B.

Cotton in 1880, the Campbell Addition settled in 1881 by the Campbell Real Estate Company, and the Magoffin Addition settled in 1882 by Joseph Magoffin.¹⁰⁰ Garcia del Barrio's property was surveyed and zoned into the Campbell Addition. "Such possession and disposition by said Campbell Real Estate Company of [my] property was without title, right, or permission acquired from me," Garcia del Barrio explained in writing years later, "and said land is now being held, claimed, and used by persons who claim to have purchased the same of said Campbell Real Estate Company."¹⁰¹

Like all colonial projects, renaming Partido Chamizal into the Cotton, Magoffin, and Campbell Additions "functioned as a routine mechanism for possession, in which a new cultural presence was imprinted onto the land to both confirm and create a space upon which colonizaton could occur."¹⁰² To this end, it was a process rooted in the exclusion of Partido Chamizal's mostly elite Mexican landowners from their previous claim to whiteness and landed property.¹⁰³ American land speculators thus not only imposed a new urban blueprint, but also inscribed a new racial hierarchy onto the ground wherein Partido Chamizal's Mexican claimants were rendered racially inferior to Anglo Americans and naturally landless. The law of accretion was the boundary's built-in imperfection that opened the door to this Mexican dispossession in Partido Chamizal. "I was compelled," Garcia del Barrio said as he recalled the Anglo Americans who would greet him at the river's northern bank with guns in their hands, "through fear of

personal violence, to abandon the property to those who now hold it.”¹⁰⁴

Though the nascent settler community of Anglo El Paso used the law of accretion to assert the legitimacy of their settlement on el Chamizal, their legal application of this law was fraught and highly debatable. Though it is difficult to establish if Partido Chamizal’s claimants were themselves using the law of accretion to narrate their own settler legitimacy, they never once ceased to insist that the river had moved suddenly and violently—and therefore that el Chamizal remained Mexican territory. In any case, it was only until 1889 when the United States and Mexico formally established the International Boundary Commission (IBC and later renamed International Water and Boundary Commission) that Partido Chamizal claimants had an official recourse to contest American settlement in Partido Chamizal. It would take another five years, however, for the IBC to officially accept a letter of complaint from Garcia del Barrio. In that 1894 letter, Garcia del Barrio explained that his grandfather had maintained peaceful possession of the Chamizal Grant until his death 1865.¹⁰⁵ It was only after an “abrupt and sudden change” in the river in 1873, Garcia del Barrio explained, that the property was transferred north of the river.¹⁰⁶ Thereafter, he said, “a few North Americans, who supposing this land to belong to the United States of North America, pretended to come into possession of the same.”¹⁰⁷ Even upon its initial review of this 1894 letter, it would take another two years for the IBC to accept his case—which they referred to as “Chamizal case no. 4.”

Despite Garcia del Barrio’s clear outline of events in this letter, the American IBC Commissioner Anson Mills denied the merits of these early events by insisting that “the United States held undisputed authority” over el Chamizal from 1852 to 1894.¹⁰⁸ The basis for Mills’ argument was that “no claim was ever officially made or asserted to any part of the land in dispute” until Garcia del Barrio’s 1894 letter.¹⁰⁹ This was to argue that although there was record of Garcia del Barrio writing letters, organizing meetings, and receiving the written support of the Ayuntamiento of El Paso del Norte well before 1894, this record of protest was “unofficial” because it took place prior the IBC’s official acceptance of Chamizal case no. 4—and therefore was inadmissible evidence. Only after weeks of debate, did Mills finally concede on this point and agree with the Mexican IBC Commissioner, Javier Osorno, that the issue of el Chamizal was not simply the case of Garcia del Barrio claiming a small parcel of private property. Rather, Chamizal case no. 4 was an international land and boundary dispute in which Mexico was claiming on behalf of Garcia del Barrio hundreds of acres within what Mexico called Partido Chamizal and which Anglo Americans had incorporated, in 1885, into the City of El Paso as its First and Second Wards.

But even once Mills and Osorno agreed that Chamizal case no. 4 involved

a much larger swath of land, the question of el Chamizal's boundaries—where it began and where it ended—became a problem. When Mills and Osorno consulted Emory and Salazar's Maps No. 29 to resolve this problem, "there was at once discovered a material discrepancy between the two [maps] and this unfortunate at the most important point with reference to the subject of [el Chamizal]."¹¹⁰ To Mills and Osorno's dismay, Maps No. 29 differed so plainly and to such a degree that they agreed that they in no way clarified the location of the 1852 channel between the two cities. "It then appearing to both Commissioners that there were so many embarrassing questions surrounding the immediate consideration of this case," Mills and Osorno decided that if they were to determine el Chamizal's whereabouts they would first need to resurvey and resecure the sanctify of 1852 channel location through El Paso and Cd. Juárez.¹¹¹

As El Paso's former deputy surveyor, Mills agreed to do the resurvey.¹¹² When Mills finished, he claimed to have finally mapped the river's 1852 location in its proper place.¹¹³ Though Mexico eventually agreed to accept Mills' resurvey, public trust in his work among Mexicans was strained. This was not simply because of distrust in cartography more broadly or as Craib has put it: "When viewed 'from below' free of the cartographer's self-delusions, maps and the processes that created them appear as ambiguous, contested, and contestable as the borders [cartographers] sought to fix."¹¹⁴ Rather, this public distrust was largely due to allegations that Mills could not objectively resurvey the 1852 location on account of a number of conflicts of interest—including not only that his brother, W.W. Mills, owned land within the disputed area, but also that Mills himself had, in 1887, conveyed and warranted titles in the disputed area, and being liable on this warranty, was an interested party in the Chamizal case.¹¹⁵ These allegations against Mills only intensified when he continued to insist in his capacity as the US IBC Commissioner that el Chamizal had not been wholly within the territory and of Mexico in 1852.

Eventually, however, Mills conceded and said he was "ready and willing to admit on the part of his government" that at the time of the establishment of the boundary between the two governments in 1852 el Chamizal "was wholly within the territory and jurisdiction of Mexico."¹¹⁶ Having finally agreed on this point, Mills and Osorno agreed that if they were to settle Chamizal case no. 4, they would have to determine whether the Río Grande had moved from its 1852 location by gradual accretion or sudden avulsion. Answering this question hinged on an interpretation of the Treaty of 1884 and the law of accretion. But because both Mills and Osorno argued the law of accretion rendered el Chamizal their own—Mills arguing the river had moved gradually and Osorno arguing it had moved suddenly—the 1884 Treaty did little to clarify the issue of el Chamizal. Consequently, Mills and Osorno began soliciting testimonies from long-

standing residents on both sides of the boundary with the hope that these witnesses would prove whether the river had moved by accretion or avulsion. Neither Mills nor Osorno, however, were prepared for what these testimonies would illuminate.

Of the seven witnesses called upon to testify, not only did they describe multiple extraordinary floods in the 1860s that moved Partido Chamizal north of the Río Grande, but they also arguably described both accretion and avulsion shifts when they said that “violent changes” in the river had “washed away the land.”¹¹⁷ Though deluges were seasonal expectations in this region, residents of Cd. Juárez who testified said that the great floods of the 1860s were distinct. In 1862, for instance, the river flooded for nearly four consecutive months.¹¹⁸ So overwhelming was this flooding that residents living in Partido Chamizal at the time described the banks of the river as folding into themselves and rapidly wearing away at the Río Grande.¹¹⁹ How long it took for the water to subside is unclear; but when it did “[t]here was nothing left between where the river settled in its new channel at Fifth Street and the old channel it had run in before.”¹²⁰ But even this flood did not compare with the two that would follow; it was these subsequent floods sometime between 1864 and 1865 that carried the town away by eroding the riverbank a rate of fifty to one hundred yards a night.¹²¹ “There were instances in which people living in houses a distant fifty yards from the bank, on one evening, had to fly in the morning from the place on account of the encroachments of the river,” testified Mariano Samaniego, a prominent El Paso de Norte resident and relative to Garcia del Barrio, to the IBC. “It carried away forests without giving time to the people to cut the trees down.”¹²² While some residents fled, others stood on the edge of their city watching the buildings and farm lands fall out from under them. “People would be standing on the banks watching a piece go down,” testified Esperidion Provencio, who grew up in Partido Chamizal and was 17 years old in 1865, “and somebody would call ‘look out! There is more going to fall!’ and they would have to jump to keep from falling into the river.”¹²³ This was the flood, another resident testified to the IBC, that ran “with such violence” and with “such force that the noise of the banks falling seemed like the boom of canon, and it was frightful.”¹²⁴ And as it had been with the great flood of 1862, it was hard for residents to say when the flooding of these subsequent deluges subsided. But once it did, the river settled another seven blocks south along 12th and 13th Streets.¹²⁵

In their cross examinations, Mills and Osorno focused on clarifying *when* and *how* the most significant shift in the river took place. Answers to these questions, however, were rarely clear cut. Though the record suggests that the floods of 1862 and 1865 were both monumental in moving the river south, most of the witnesses summoned by Mills and Osorno in 1896 said it was a flood in 1864. “The largest change was violent as I have already

stated and took place in 1864,” Ynocente Ochoa, who owned property in Partido Chamizal, told the commissioners.¹²⁶ When Mills and Osorno asked if this 1864 change was slow or violent, however, witnesses suggested the distinction was confusing. “As I said before it was sometimes slow and sometimes violent,” replied Ochoa.¹²⁷ When asked this same question, Esperidion Provencio told the commissioners that, “I cannot appreciate what is meant by slow or violent, but sometimes as much as fifty yards would be washed away at certain points in a day.”¹²⁸ “The best illustration I can give,” explained another named Samuel Schutz, “is to consider a lot of laborers working on a sandbank and undermining by picks and shovels, etc, enough gravel or sand to make the upper bank too heavy, and give away and fall into the river.”¹²⁹ After hearing these testimonies, Mills and Osorno continued to debate whether the river had moved by accretion or avulsion. The more complicated truth, however, was that the processes that governed the Río Grande through el Chamizal defied neat definitions of accretion and avulsion. Even trained engineers that would later be hired to study the Río Grande at el Chamizal were taken aback by the river’s character. “The river’s work of altering its bed to suit the necessities of the moment is never ending,” reported an U.S. engineer hired by Mills. “I have been unable to learn whether this movement has been continuous throughout the thirty years, or whether it has been intermittent.”¹³⁰ “It is probable,” another authority commented, “that no other international boundary represents such a tangle of accretion and avulsion cases.”¹³¹ But Mills and Osorno dared not admit that the river refused to abide by their rules and remained outside their knowing.

Ultimately, Mills insisted that the testimonies described an accretion change in the river and that el Chamizal was the rightful possession of the United States. Osorno, on the other hand, was convinced the river had changed its path by avulsion. “Who, unless blinded,” Osorno argued, “can sustain any longer that a river so inconstant as the Bravo does its work of destruction step by step and degree by degree” as the term accretion implied?¹³² Surely, he added, any reasonable person would agree that the “tremendous, destructive power” of this river’s meanderings—while sometimes *characterized* by erosion—could only be *experienced* as avulsion.¹³³ Mills rejected this interpretation, arguing that according to the law of accretion the river’s meanderings could only be attributed to one of two distinct classes: accretion and avulsion. “Any other unspecified change, as is implied in the major proposition of the syllogism of the Mexican Commissioner,” he argued, “we have no authority to consider, but that our respective conclusion must be in favor of one or the other, as specifically stated in the [1884] Treaty.”¹³⁴ Though in the end Mills and Osorno were unable to come to any kind of agreement, in this 1918 memoir, *My Life*, Mills masks the implication of this deadlock. “Commissioner Osorno and

I disagreed on the proper construction of the words ‘slow and gradual, erosion and deposit of alluvium,’” he explained, “rather than on matters of fact.”¹³⁵ This remark, though seemingly objective in its historical posture, was just another last minute attempt to conceal and deny the unspeakable: that the Río Grande and el Chamizal remained unknowable in ways that were self-determined.

Violence & Self-Making in El Paso: Communal Scenes of Mexican Dispossession

While Mills and Osorno debated the law of accretion, Anglo El Paso had come to the realization that simply denying the Chamizal District—a place dense with meaning and history—and imposing a new urban blue print atop it was not be enough to perpetuate this colonial project. Indeed, despite what they perceived to be the totality of Anglo American control in the region, el Chamizal was the puncture to this dominance. “[D]eemed by Texans and North Americans to be part of their city of El Paso, Tex., and by Mexicans to be part of their city formerly called El Paso del Norte and later renamed Cd. Juárez,” the area was troublingly characterized by multiple, contested political jurisdictions, inconsistent and overlapping place-names, and highly contextualized and distinct systems of tenure and property.¹³⁶ For these reasons, by the 1890s Anglo El Paso could no longer tolerate el Chamizal’s enduring presence and decided it had to deal with it. To do so, they would use the coupling of denial and violence.

Word spread quickly among the Mexican residents in Partido Chamizal that armed Anglo American men were arriving in the dark hours of morning to tear down their homes. They were coming, neighbors told one another, with legal papers in their pockets and sledge hammers in their hands. One morning, for instance, Santiago Alvarado, who grew up in Partido Chamizal and had inherited his father’s 1834 Mexican property in the district, received a notice in the mail stating that the Campbell Real Estate Company had filed a suit to dispossess him of his property in the Campbell Addition. The rationale, the letter explained, was Alvarado’s invalid Mexican title.¹³⁷ As such, Alvarado would be forced from the property unless he paid a bond of \$2,400—in which case he would be allowed to remain in his home until a court determined otherwise. “I was not, and am not a man of wealth,” Santiago recalled in writing nearly a decade later, “and consequently was unable to give the large bond that was required of me in order to retain possession of my property.”¹³⁸ The consequences for his defiance to abide by American law would be severe.

It was pouring rain that early morning in 1897 when they came for Alvarado and his family. An Anglo-American developer named A.M. Loomis, who had purchased several lots in the Campbell Addition, had hired two

men to evict the family from their home and destroy what was left.¹³⁹ After first tearing down the property fence, the two men tore down the front door and entered the house. Though the family was still sleeping, they grabbed Santiago, his wife, and their children, including a four-year-old boy named Marcelino, from their beds and dragged them into the street. The muddy water in the unpaved streets pooled around the Alvarado family as they watched the men demolish what was left of their home. As Santiago's wife held a shivering Marcelino in her arms, she wept and Santiago tried to appeal to the men to stop. "Without avail I protested against being put out in the street with my family at such a time and in the severe weather especially as one of my children was very sick," Santiago said of that night, referring to his son Marcelino.¹⁴⁰ "[M]y protest availed me nothing." We don't know where Santiago and his family went that morning after the house was torn to the ground, but we do know that Marcelino subsequently died from pneumonia and that Santiago blamed himself for the boy's death. "As a result of the exposure to the severe weather, in its condition, my child shortly thereafter died," Santiago explained years later, "and its death is attributable to the fact that I was compelled to expose him to the severe weather that existed at that time." What happened to the Alvarado family that night was not exceptional. Rather, such violent scenes of Mexican dispossession became the means through which Anglo El Paso enacted the myth of regeneration through violence.

By asserting their possession of el Chamizal through violence, Anglo El Pasoans not only came to know themselves as dominant subjects, but they also announced the racialized boundaries for who belonged in El Paso and who did not. Though some Partido Chamizal residents chose to abandon their properties altogether rather than come to face to face with such hostility, others like the Varela family prepared as best they could for when this violence arrived at their doorstep. The Varela brothers, Silverio and Francisco, had grown up in Partido Chamizal. The family house had stood on Camino Nacional, which was later renamed Stanton Street, and it was there that the family lived until the great floods of the 1860s forced the family to abandon the property, "as were all those living in that part of the district of El Chamizal that now lies on the northern side of the Rio Grande," Silverio once explained.¹⁴¹ Years later, in 1889, the two brothers returned to Partido Chamizal to reclaim the family homestead and farmlands for their own growing families. But when they arrived to what used to be the family plot, they found that parts of the property were occupied by individuals claiming possession under the Campbell Real Estate Company. Rather than confront the squatters, the brothers decided to build a home in an unoccupied area of their family plot. There, they lived until 1902 when an Anglo American man came to their doorstep. All we know about this man is his first name, Conklin, and that he claimed to have recently purchased

from the Campbell Real Estate Company the land upon which the Valera brothers had built their new home. No sooner did Conklin arrive to the home did he begin tearing down the Varela fence. Soon, another man join him and then shortly after—as if in some kind of coordinated scheme—another man named Dix. As A.M. Loomis and his men had down to Alvarado, together Conklin and his men broke through the Valera property fence and tore away at the Valera house. Silverio protested this destruction and left the scene to find an attorney to who could help him. “[I]n the meantime,” Silverio recalled in a 1905 testimony, “my brother and his wife arrived on the scene and in an altercation resulting in their protesting against Dix’s forceful invasion of our possessions and destruction of our property, Dix made a violent assault on both my brother and my brother’s wife, knocked them both down and beat them with a club.”¹⁴² When Silverio returned, he too was beaten bloody. “My brother, his wife, and myself were all painfully and seriously hurt and wounded by Dix.”¹⁴³ Such violent scenes of Mexican dispossession and racial subjugation announced Anglo El Paso’s racialized boundaries for who belonged and who did not.

These communal scenes of Anglo-American dominance required constant, coordinated vigilance by its perpetrators—so much so that they were made known to Anglo El Paso in advance to their unfolding. One El Pasoan named Edward J. Hogan, for instance, recalled in a 1905 affidavit watching armed members of Sorensen & Morgan, a leading contractor firm in El Paso, raid the home of a Mexican tenant in el Chamizal whose landlord held Mexican title to the property.¹⁴⁴ Hogan, who worked in the area, said he was made privy to Sorensen & Morgan’s plans to raid the home several days in advance. “At an early hour in the morning and about the date when I had been told an attempt would be made to take forcible possession of the property, I saw an American named Morgan, a member of the firm Sorenson and Morgan, contractors of El Paso, Texas, go into the said tract of land,” Hogan explained, adding, “Morgan came to the place in a wagon and was armed with a gun.”¹⁴⁵ “I know that the firm of Sorenson & Morgan took possession of a part of the property,” he concluded, “and have since remained and are still in possession thereof.”¹⁴⁶ Hogan’s testimony confirms that Mexican dispossession in Partido Chamizal was a violent spectacle that Anglo El Pasoans were called upon to witness and in some cases participate in. And it was through these violent communal scenes of Anglo-American dominance that Anglo El Paso made the facts of landownership and landlessness meaningful in the region by securing and equating property with Anglo-Whiteness and placelessness with the racialized difference of Mexicans.¹⁴⁷

Enacting the Cotton, Campbell, and Magoffin subdivisions was not an effortless, unchallenged endeavor taking place across a vacant landscape or hinterland, but rather a coordinated crime among Anglo El Paso in

the established Mexican district of Partido Chamizal.¹⁴⁸ In what was perhaps an act of defiance in 1907 to Anglo El Paso's public spectacles of Mexican dispossession and racial subjugation, several hundred Mexicans asserted their claim to el Chamizal by building more than two hundred adobe cabins in the Cotton Addition.¹⁴⁹ Almost immediately, however, the cabins were demolished. Yet, this was not the end of Mexican protest, as those who were tenants to Anglo-American landowners within el Chamizal were known to successfully negotiate their rents (sometimes reduced by nearly half) by refusing to pay at all on the ground that the land's title was faulty.¹⁵⁰ While this upset Anglo American profit and real estate business within el Chamizal, landlords in Segundo Barrio also justified neglecting their properties and tenants on account of such business "risks" within el Chamizal.

The transformation of Partido Chamizal from a predominantly ranch community of *ejido* and private farmers to the Mexican "slums" of El Paso's First and Second Wards is rooted in the violent destruction of Partido Chamizal that would lay the groundwork for the uneven development that would structure Chihuahuita and Segundo Barrio.¹⁵¹ Just as it took racism to stage these violent scenes of destruction, it took racism to produce the under maintained urban amenities of Chihuahuita and Segundo Barrio that Calleros, among others, would spend their personal and professional lives wrestling with. Thus, the coordinated production of these "slums" cannot be divorced from the destruction of Partido Chamizal and the violent dispossession of its Mexican claimants. Both are part of the same colonial project and myth of regeneration through violence that actively elide Native histories/claims to place and produce uneven socio-spatial relations while simultaneously denying their deliberation production in order to preserve Anglo American dominance and innocence.

The Chamizal Arbitration & "the ruling that failed to decide"

By 1910, Anglo El Paso had largely carried out its scheme to destroy Partido Chamizal. And yet, the question of who held proper title to the area had yet to be officially determined by the United States and Mexican governments. When Mexico and the United States finally agreed on rules of arbitration in 1910 to determine proper title, a third member, a Canadian named Eugene Lafleur, was temporarily added to the IBC to complete the task of the settling the dispute. As before, the Commission was to decide whether the entire Chamizal Zone was formed by slow and gradual accretion or by sudden avulsion. However, when the commission began reviewing evidence and hearing witnesses, including many of those who had testified to Mills and Osorno in 1896, a new group of Anglo Americans also submitted affidavits in which they suggested that el Chamizal was a

Mexican fabrication. “The authorities of the United States and of the State of Texas exercised undisputed and practically unquestioned jurisdiction over what is known as the Chamizal tract, which I never heard called by that name until after the origien [sic] of the present controversy between the two countries, about 1895,” testified William Michelle Coldwell, who said he arrived to El Paso in 1873 after the great floods of 1860s.¹⁵² Though such accusations were refuted by the arbitration, outright denying el Chamizal’s existence had already taken root in El Paso.

Even so, the arbitration tribunal proceeded in their deliberations and the case eventually cumulated around six questions and answers:¹⁵³

1) *Was the boundary line established by the 1848 and 1853 Treaties along the Rio Grande fixed and invariable?* On this issue, the Lafluer voted “no” with US IBC Commissioner Anson Mills. Fernando Beltra y Puga, the Mexico IBC Commissioner, voted yes.

2) *Had the United States acquired title to the Chamizal through uncontested possession and usage?* All three Commissioners voted “no.”

3) *Did the Treaty of 1884 apply to all changes in the Río Grande—even those before 1884?* The Canadian Commissioner voted “yes” with the United States. Mexico voted “no.”

4) *Was the entire Chamizal Zone formed by accretion within the meaning of the 1884 Treaty?* On this question, the Canadian Commissioner voted “no” with Mexico. The United States voted “yes.”

5) *Was the formation of the Chamizal Zone up to 1864 due to accretion?* On this issue, the Canadian voted “yes” with Mexico. Mills declined to vote, arguing that the tribunal was not empowered to divide the tract between the two countries.

6) *Was the whole erosion which occurred in 1864 and after that date slow and gradual?* To this question, both the Canadian and Mexican Commissioners voted “no.” Mills declined to vote for the same principal reason as before, adding that locating the 1864 channel was also close to impossible.

Based on these votes, in June 1911, the tribunal issued its official ruling that the river had moved by “rapid erosion” in 1864 and therefore was to be treated as an avulsion shift.¹⁵⁴ It is difficult to say how exactly the tribunal decided that the 1864 shift was the most significant change in the river given witnesses described at three great floods in the 1860s that dramatically transferred Partido Chamizal north of the Río Grande. The decision, however, appears to be for the sake of narrative simplicity and

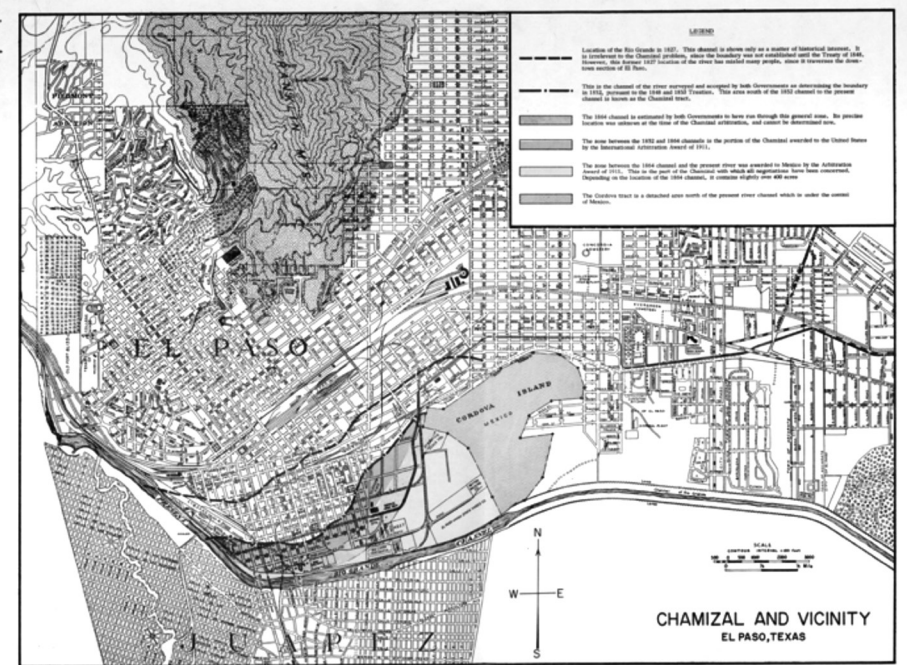


Figure 11. Source: Cleofas Calleros Papers, C.L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department, University of Texas at El Paso Library.

reifying the integrity of the law of accretion. Indeed, though it was never publicly acknowledged, the tribunal’s ruling of “rapid erosion” demonstrated that the discrete principles of accretion and avulsion as defined by the law of accretion ultimately proved unworkable in its application to the Río Grande.¹⁵⁵ This was largely because the law of accretion was based on precedents from Western Europe, the eastern United States, and rivers in humid regions of the world where the classical definitions for accretion and avulsion often neatly applied. The Río Grande through el Chamizal had defied these definitions, and therefore required flexibility in the form of “rapid erosion” to conceal this defiance.

Despite fraught documentation for the 1864 channel location, the tribunal declared that all land north of this 1864 channel was U.S. territory and that the land south of this channel was to be returned to Mexico as el Chamizal.¹⁵⁶ The ruling merited the front page the morning on June 16, 1911. *The El Paso Morning Times* cast it as “the decision that failed to decide” and chastised the tribunal for having “no idea how such a boundary could be located, and did not know of any person who did know.”¹⁵⁷ Mills, who had previously agreed along with his counterparts to accept

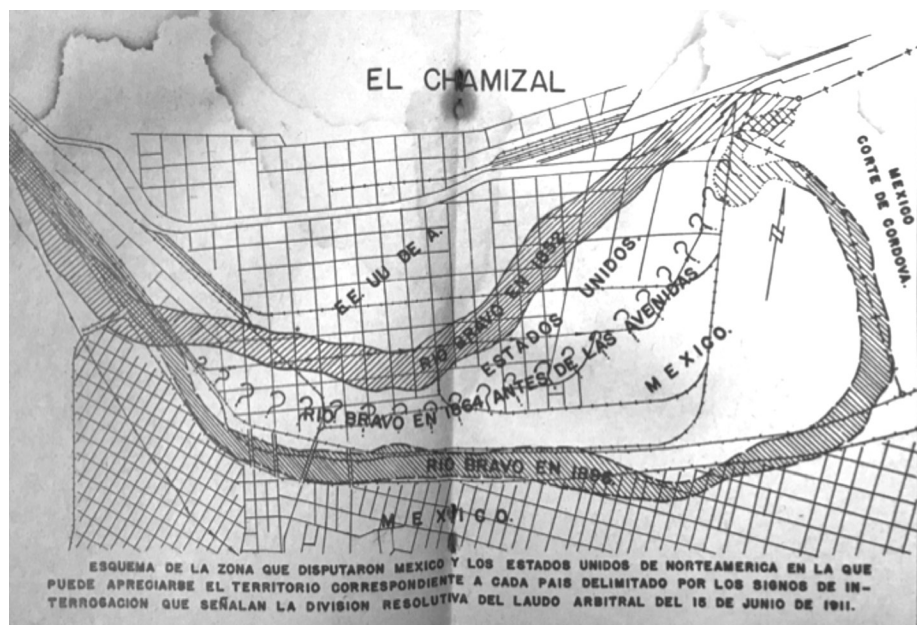


Figure 12. Source: Cleofas Calleros Papers, C.L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department, University of Texas at El Paso Library.

whatever ruling was issued by the tribunal, refused to accept the ruling on these grounds. He argued that the 1864 channel was impossible to locate and that, in any case, “rapid erosion” was an unacceptable category under the law of accretion. From his perspective, then, the tribunal’s ruling was unlawful and his refusal to accept the decision was his legal responsibility as U.S. IBC Commissioner. While Anglo El Paso applauded Mills’ refusal, Mexicans regarded it as evidence of his unwillingness to negotiate in good faith on matters that did not meet U.S. interests. Calleros, who was present at the 1911 arbitration and 19-years-old at the time, was also disappointed. “I was present during the 1911 hearings, and in my judgment as a young law student, it seemed to me that ‘Moral justice took a bad beating,’” Calleros said in writing more than 50 years later.¹⁵⁸ Ultimately, Mills’ refusal would leave the state of Mexico to unrequitedly demand the return of el Chamizal.

El Chamizal had so long and so plainly ruptured colonial logics that everything can and must be knowable and within white colonial possession that its concealment and domination could not go unsecured forever. On July 18, 1963, President Kennedy announced that he would be the one to finally put the ghost of el Chamizal to rest by approving a memorandum

that proposed to resolved the dispute “by giving effect in today’s circumstances to the 1911 international arbitration award.”¹⁵⁹ This meant agreeing on and mapping that which had been impossible to pin down: the 1864 river channel. Nonetheless, in order for the settlement to proceed, a newly agreed upon, streamlined, and in no way certain location for the 1864 channel was mapped and solidified in place through a concrete canal. In turn, this redrawn boundary determined the acreage ceded to Mexico.

By 1964, and under the direction of President Lyndon B. Johnson, the Chamizal Treaty was finalized. The United States would receive 193 acres of Mexican territory in exchange for 630 acres symbolically returned to Mexico as “el Chamizal.” Though this return of land was celebrated as the settlement’s great triumph, its unspoken achievement was the declaration of the 1864 channel in a now knowable and fixed place, which allowed both the United States and Mexico to insist the fundamental conundrum of the Chamizal dispute had been wholly resolved and that the terms of the settlement merely reconfigured El Paso and Cd. Juárez to how they had been in 1864.¹⁶⁰ “Neither country lost or gained anything in the settlement,” insisted David Herrera, Mexico’s international boundary commissioner. “The boundary merely reverted to where it had been before the Rio Grande changed its course during the 1864 floods.”¹⁶¹ This version of the Chamizal story was central to US and Mexican state narratives that no only inscribed reason, linearity, and settler domination onto this terrain, but which “devise[d] formulas to repress the unthinkable and to bring it back within the realm of accepted discourse.”¹⁶²

Conclusion

The historical geography and legacy of colonial El Paso is predicated on a cultivated culture of erasure and denial toward el Chamizal. Both are rooted in the violent destruction of Partido Chamizal, a colonial refusal to open El Paso to the mystery of el Chamizal, a consistent removal of el Chamizal from the canon of El Paso history, as well as the bending of el Chamizal’s complex geography to fit the needs of the 1964 settlement that demanded a coherent 630 acre tract of land that could be disciplined and expelled from the U.S. nation. Indeed, it is in this landscape of erasure and denial that El Paso, Texas, emerges.

But even the Chamizal Treaty’s project of erasure and denial could not fully conceal the ghost of el Chamizal and its integral relationship to El Paso. The official 630 acre definition for el Chamizal, for instance, required constant repetition to dress it in any semblance of legitimacy—especially for those who lived in South El Paso. To Segundo Barrio resident Francisco Ortiz, whose property was condemned by the settlement, el Chamizal was not as the treaty said—and therefore was grounds for defiance. “I, Francisco

Ortiz, property owner at 1220 South Stanton Street, on the disputed land of the Chamizal, oppose the Chamizal pact,” Ortiz begins his 1963 letter to the *El Paso Herald-Post*.¹⁶³ In this letter, Ortiz confirms that in all its purported precision and authority, the official definition for el Chamizal falls apart alongside the memories of Segundo Barrio residents who have lived, engaged, and struggled with el Chamizal’s riddled boundaries for decades, if not a lifetime. “They don’t know what the Chamizal territory is, but I do,” writes Ortiz, referring to the presidents of the United States and Mexico, “because I am an old timer here in El Paso. I am going on 80 years of age.” Ortiz insists that had the presidents been old timers like him they would know “that the Chamizal does not start at 8th Street” as the settlement claimed. Instead, he explains, they would know that el Chamizal is a much larger swatch of land: that in the beginning it began at the hem of the former El Toro Portland Cement (at the intersection of today’s Paisano Drive and Executive Boulevard), continued south no further than San Antonio Street, and no further east than Santa Fe Street before it cut back up toward the cement factory.¹⁶⁴ They would also know that it was only later, as the Río Grande moved south, that el Chamizal became even larger. Consequently, if the presidents were old timers in El Paso they would have been witnesses to this history and would know as Ortiz knows that half of the businesses in downtown El Paso are located in el Chamizal. “Why then should property owners from Eighth street south be affected by the treaty and the property owners north of Eighth street not be affected?” he asked. “I cannot understand because from the Río Grande to San Antonio Street is Chamizal, as sure as daylight.” While Ortiz’s frustration rings throughout this letter, his long memory in South El Paso also announces the unspeakable: that the official Chamizal story is fragile and susceptible to moments of fraying and unraveling that underscore el Chamizal not as something wholly known, but obscure and contested still, not as something expelled from El Paso, but firmly within the city’s boundaries, and not as a passive place, but a subversive site of struggle. “I advise property owners in Chamizal not to move one inch,” Ortiz continues, before concluding, “I want all property owners to stick to what I say. If they do not stick with me, we will suffer the consequences.”

Calleros, who likely anticipated such resistance to the settlement, understood the assignment before him: that putting the ghost of el Chamizal to rest would require rewriting the complicated, obscure story of el Chamizal and in turn convincing the El Paso-Cd. Juárez borderlands that el Chamizal was as the settlement defined it. Thus, when Calleros finished writing “El Chamizal—Qué Es?” he knew exactly who to send it to: the U.S. IWBC Commissioner Joseph F. Friedkin who was tasked with carrying out the terms of Chamizal Treaty. Within a week’s time, Friedkin had read “El Chamizal—¿Qué Es?” and replied to Calleros with utmost

gratitude. “I am most appreciative of your thoughtful letter of March 20, 1963, with which you kindly sent five copies of your ‘El Chamizal, Qué Es?’” Friedkin wrote on March 27, 1963.¹⁶⁵ “This booklet will, I am sure, prove most useful in giving a better historical perspective on a matter which, as you well know, has often been distorted.” Less than week went by before Friedkin wrote to Calleros again, this time to inform Calleros that he had sent extra copies of the pamphlet to the U.S. Department of State, “as I know they will be glad to have them.” “Once again,” Freidkin wrote, “I feel that you are performing a splendid service by your efforts to promote a more objective understanding by the public of this long-standing problem.”

Within a matter of months from when Calleros first sent “El Chamizal—¿Qué Es?” to Friedkin, he would become the federal government’s unofficial lobbyist on all matters involving el Chamizal. In the month of May alone, Calleros distributed 150 copies of “El Chamizal—¿Qué Es?” and wrote to Friedkin informing him of the matter. “As the date of announcement [for the settlement] nears,” Calleros wrote, “let me assure you that I have been flooded with all kinds of inquiries and suggestions.”¹⁶⁶ In addition to distributing his pamphlet, however, Calleros began going door to door with the intention of convincing residents in Segundo Barrio to support the Chamizal Treaty and its promise of justice and progress. When residents wrote to him with their concerns, he promised them that if they went along with the Chamizal Treaty, the government would take care of them. “May I assure you that everything is being done to protect all individuals affected by this settlement,” Calleros wrote to one resident, “and may you have all the confidence as being treated fairly in your individual problem.”¹⁶⁷ As a result of these conversations, Calleros began collecting letters of support from residents—many of whom lived within el Chamizal but outside the condemned 630 acres—and sent these letters to Friedkin as evidence for public approval of the settlement.¹⁶⁸

Eventually, however, Calleros also developed a rapport with Friedkin and other federal officials that consisted of frequent reports on the southside residents who remained unconvinced and were not cooperating with settlement proceedings. “[T]he real troublemakers live in the Rio Linda addition,” reads one of Calleros’ reports, in which he refers to the residents of the Rio Linda neighborhood along 11th, 12th, and 13th Streets in South El Paso that fell within the condemned 630 acres.¹⁶⁹ To assess the threat of this resistance, Calleros began attending meetings held by the Chamizal Civic Association, an advocacy group made up of Rio Linda residents and led by one resident named Elvira Villa Escajeda (formerly known as Lacarra).¹⁷⁰ “Elvira has organized a strong group from the Rio Linda addition to present their demands that they neither want to be Mexicanos nor do they want their properties expropriated to Mexico—and even more so not to be themselves deported to Mexico,” reads a page from

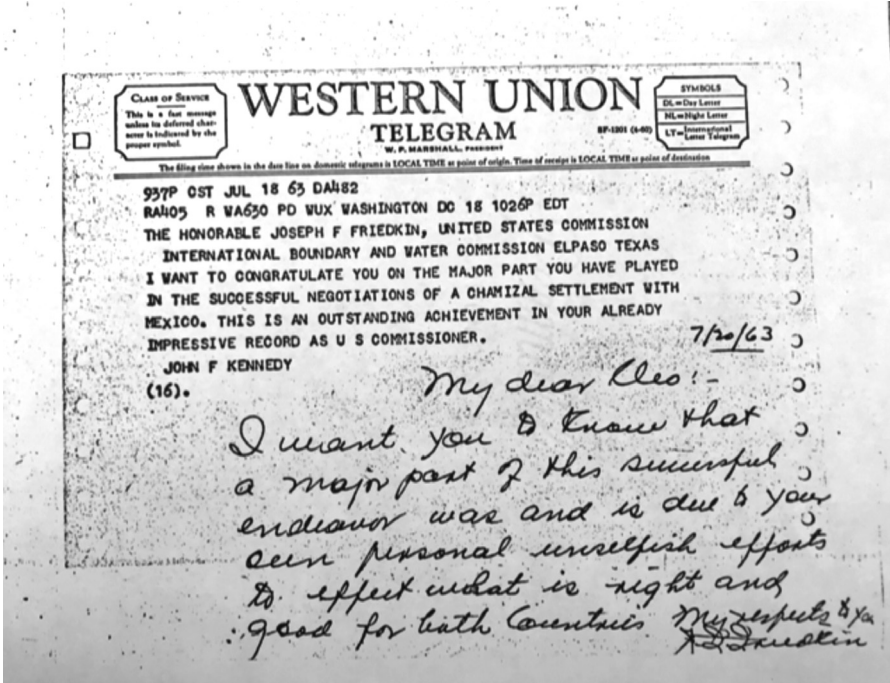


Figure 13. Handwritten note from Joseph F. Friedkin to Cleofas Calleros atop a telegram from President John F. Kenney. Source: Cleofas Calleros Papers, C.L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department, University of Texas at El Paso Library.

Calleros' notes dated February 1963.¹⁷¹ As he continued to attend these meetings and report in his findings, he seemed to develop a callous for the predicament of Rio Linda residents and once sent a letter to Friedkin in which he described a woman sobbing over the impending loss of her home as “the old lady who puts the ‘crying act.’”¹⁷² After some time, however, he became adamant that Escajeda “appears to be a real troublemaker” and thereafter focused his reports on her relationships and conflicts with association members and federal representatives who also opposed the Chamizal Treaty.¹⁷³ “Ever since attending the meeting arranged by the Chamizal Civic Association for Representative Ed Foreman, which I attended, I have been trying to find a little time to write my impressions as to what went on,” Calleros wrote to Friedkin in May 1963, in which he also forwarded additional letters of support and suggested that Rio Linda was not “actually” part of el Chamizal.¹⁷⁴ “However,” Calleros said, “I have obtained some letters from people who *actually* live in the Chamizal Zone, as per attached.”¹⁷⁵ It is difficult to establish the success of Calleros' efforts to undermine the Chamizal Civic Association—especially

when Escajeda was successful in rallying Chamizal residents to demand a variety of compensations for their displacement, including fair-market-value for their homes.¹⁷⁶ Even so, in March of 1963 Friedkin's secretary wrote to Calleros thanking him for the time he had spent speaking with Escajeda and reporting on her activities. "Before departing for Washington Commissioner Friedkin asked me to acknowledge your kind letter of March 4, 1963 reporting on your encouraging conversation with Mrs. Lacarra, and to reiterate his appreciation for your fine work and splendid cooperation."¹⁷⁷

By July of that year, the terms of the Chamizal Treaty would be approved, and Calleros would begin addressing his letters to Friedkin with "My dear Joe"—which Friedkin reciprocated.¹⁷⁸ "My dear Cleo," begins a handwritten note from Friedkin to Calleros across a telegram announcing the Chamizal Treaty. "I want you to know that a major point of this successful endeavor was and is due to your own personal unselfish efforts to effect what is right and good for both countries."¹⁷⁹ Friedkin would send many notes of gratitude to Calleros; but he was not the only federal official to do so. "I owe you a great debt of gratitude for the advice and orale support which you gave to this Embassy," reads a 1963 letter to Calleros from Thomas C. Mann, the U.S. Ambassador to Mexico. "I know you must feel a sense of satisfaction," Mann continued, "for having participated in the discussions which led up to the recommendations which have been approved by the Presidents."¹⁸⁰ Though these letters of gratitude may seem simple at face value, both Friedkin and Mann seemed to also be assuring Calleros that if his contributions to settling the Chamizal dispute had gone overlooked by the public, they had not. As if they were trying to say: *You, Calleros, are the unsung hero of the Chamizal Treaty.* To which Calleros gladly replied: "It has been a distinct pleasure to have had a part in 'molding' some opinions, for it has been, since 1902, that I have had or formed some part of the Chamizal."¹⁸¹

Molding el Chamizal to fit the needs of the Chamizal Treaty, however, did not usher in the kind of progress for Segundo Barrio that Calleros had likely promised residents of the Second Ward. Segundo Barrio property titles—ratified overnight by the settlement—did little to alter the pattern of uneven development that the city and many landlords practiced toward this neighborhood. Instead, uneven development in the Second Ward accelerated as landlords realized that if they could vacate their tenements and properties they could sell or lease the land to commercial developers and investors now interested in the unclouded area. "This led to stagnant investment in residential properties," writes the El Paso journalist Martin Paredes, and "the more substandard they became, the easier it was to bring the power of the government to displace those living there."¹⁸² Meanwhile, a series of urban planning initiatives with the explicit goal of modernizing the city of El Paso were passed alongside the Chamizal Treaty. Known as El



Figure 14. Political poster of Familias Unidas de Chamizal. Source: Illustration by Zeke Peña for Familias Unidas del Chamizal; zpvisual.com

Paso Mayor Judson Williams' Four Point Program, these urban planning initiatives drastically reconfigured South El Paso's urban blueprint in ways that invited more uneven development. One of these initiatives, for instance, was the Cesar Chavez Border Highway. Today it is known by locals as the "Chamizal Freeway," and runs directly through where some of the homes condemned by the treaty once stood.¹⁸³ Official messaging framed the destruction of these homes and entire neighborhoods as the price for progress.

While most federal accounts report that 5,600 mostly Mexican American residents were displaced by the Chamizal Treaty, this is a misleading estimate given it accounts only for those removed from the 630 acres ceded to Mexico and conveniently overlooks the additional 56 acres in South El Paso that were seized during settlement proceedings to make room for

Williams' Four Point Program.¹⁸⁴ It is telling, then, that the displacement of this Mexican American generation of Chamizal residents took place amid the U.S.' most pronounced decade of highway construction through urban renewal and seizure of properties through eminent domain.¹⁸⁵ These "public good" programs consistently target already vulnerable and marginalized non-white communities. The costs of which are consistent: the rupture of networks of support, decreased political power due to population loss, and the dispossession of assets and wealth, however modest, that leads to further marginalization and uneven development. Some of these vicissitudes are currently being confronted by a new generation of Chamizal residents in a new *Barrio Chamizal* in South Central El Paso. Led by mothers and women, Barrio Chamizal is organized under the neighborhood association, Familias Unidas del Barrio Chamizal, which in the last 10 years alone has challenged numerous practices of uneven development. These include not only the establishment of a bus depot adjacent the local Bowie High School, or proposals to close the Beall Elementary School, but inaction on the part of the city concerning documented issues of environmental racism in the neighborhood.¹⁸⁶ In fact, the activism of Familias Unidas to combat uneven development is largely why the recently established Chamizal Community Center—complete with a gym, playground, bilingual library, and computer room—exists today. Barrio Chamizal cannot be divorced, then, from the multiple Chamizal barrios and residents who came before them, as each are part of ongoing legacy tied to el Chamizal as a site of deliberate uneven development, the destruction of Mexican and Mexican American homes, and organized resistance to these processes.

Though there were immediate signs that the Chamizal Treaty was never designed to benefit South El Paso residents nor lift the southside out of its stigmatized lower rank within the city's social geography, Calleros' vision for success in the Second Ward was unwavering. He was convinced that if he played his part in eliminating el Chamizal by working within the liberal agenda of slum clearance and urban renewal, through conventional methods of struggle, and alongside established political leaders, that he would combat his primary concerns of discrimination, poverty, and slums in South El Paso. Indeed, even as the signs suggested otherwise, Calleros was certain that this liberal agenda was South El Paso's ticket out of these indignities. He said as much in a 1967 letter to his friend and El Paso Mayor Robert Ewing Thomason, in which Calleros mulled over the Chamizal Treaty and what was to become of his legacy. "We are both getting old, new ideas have come into the picture; sociologists are taking over, what will become of our Slums, only time will tell," Calleros wrote to Thomason, before concluding, "I have a list of more than 30 slum tenements that you and I recommend for complete condemnation and destructions. Every one of them still standing with one or two exceptions which were forced to be

torn down on account of the Chamizal settlement.”¹⁸⁷ Calleros may have felt there was still far more work to be done in the Second Ward, but he took pleasure in what he saw at the small wins of the Chamizal Treaty’s crusade against injustice. He would revel in these wins until his death, in 1973, at the age of seventy-seven.

While Calleros is remembered by many as an “Apostle of the Border” and an “El Paso visionary,” he is not typically remembered as the champion of the Chamizal Treaty who helped to eliminate the ghost of el Chamizal and bring progress to the Second Ward.¹⁸⁸ In fact, contrary to what the United States and Mexico—or Calleros for that matter—would like us to believe, el Chamizal is not the clear-cut and closed story of progress or a neat 630 acres returned to Mexico. Rather, el Chamizal is a much larger, unfinished, and unresolved place and history of struggle where we can see and site not only El Paso’s legacy of erasure, denial, and ongoing uneven development tied to el Chamizal, but also how the ghost of el Chamizal continues to shape socio-spatial relations in this city—and not in some neat, orderly, or contained way. Who knows what Calleros would say about el Chamizal if he were still alive today. But one thing is certain: There is and has never been an easy, neat, or single answer to the question, *What is el Chamizal?* Because el Chamizal is a remarkably varied, particular, elusive, and self-determined place that exists along various—but always equally as real—lived, imagined, disbelieved, and unspeakable localities in the El Paso-Cd. Juárez borderlands. Indeed, you can find el Chamizal in South Central El Paso where the children of Familias Unidas play outside the Chamizal Community Center on Cypress Avenue. You can find it beneath the Santa Fe International Bridge where Calleros and his mother crossed the Río Grande into El Paso. You can find el Chamizal at the Santa Fe Freight House where Pedro Ignacio Garcia del Barrio’s farmhouse once stood and where Chihuahuita is presently. You’ll find it at Sacred Heart Church and everywhere in Segundo Barrio that was once known by its former name, Partido Chamizal. You can find it in downtown El Paso, at the Chamizal National Memorial along Paisano Drive, along Calle Mejía in downtown Cd. Juárez, and through the 630 acres south of the border that make up today’s Parque Chamizal. Perhaps, then, Nestor Valencia’s parents weren’t so terribly mistaken when they told their children “everything is el Chamizal.” There is, however, an anxiety toward this *everything* on the part of those who insist the Chamizal Treaty wholly resolved the Chamizal dispute. It is an anxiety that cannot bear to be found out—that is hostile to the discovery of El Paso’s coordinated scheme of erasure, violence, and denial—and which ultimately refuses to confront the fact that the Chamizal dispute remains the unfinished story and failed colonial endeavor to eliminate the ghost of el Chamizal.

Endnotes

1. Translated from Spanish by the author. Original: "Por noventa y seis años los Estados Unidos de América y los Estados Unidos Mexicanos han tenido en disute un pedazo de tierra que consiste en 630 acres en lo que ahora es la parte sur de El Paso, Texas que ordinariamente se le llama parte del Segundo Barrio." Cleofas Calleros Papers, MS231, box 33, folder 13, C. L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Dept., The University of Texas at El Paso Library.
2. Cleofas Calleros Papers, MS231, box 33, folder 13.
3. "Chamizal Pact Opens Door to Progress," *El Paso Herald Post*, July 18, 1963.
4. The canon historiography of El Paso often mentions the Chamizal Dispute, but glosses over the key role of el Chamizal in the making of what is now El Paso, Texas. See: W.H. Timmons, *El Paso: A Borderlands History* (El Paso: The University of Texas at El Paso, 1990); Leon C. Metz, *Border: The U.S.-Mexico Line* (El Paso: Mangan Books, 1989); C.L. Sonnichsen, *Pass of the North: Four Centuries on the Rio Grande Volume 1 1529-1917* (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1968); Mario, Garcia, *Desert Immigrants: The Mexicans of El Paso, 1880-1920* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), 143.
5. Divided into a number of *ejido* and private farms, Partido Chamizal was home to hundreds. In 1813, a census conducted in El Paso del Norte recorded 718 residents living in the district. Those who owned their property had titles that stemmed from Spanish and Mexican land grants—some issued as early as 1781. See: "Chamizal Census Take in 1813," *El Paso Times*, October, 28, 1967; Joe K. Parrish Papers, MS111, box 1, folder 44, C.L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Dept., University of Texas at El Paso Library.
6. Alana de Hinojosa, "El Río Grande as Pedagogy: The Unruly, Unresolved Terrains of the Chamizal Land Dispute," *American Quarterly* 73 (December 2021); Paola Juárez, *El Chamizal: Reflexiones sobre nacionalismo y frontera en torno de acuerdo territorial (1962-1967)* (Ciudad Juárez, Createspace Independent Pub, 2017), 35; Conrey Bryson, *The Land Where We Live: El Paso del Norte* (El Paso: Aniversario del Paso '73, 1973), 25.
7. "Chamizal Settlement, Freeway Bring Gigantic EP Facelifting," *El Paso Times*, September 25, 1964.
8. In a 1963 letter to Joseph F Friedkin, the U.S. Commissioner to the IWBC, Cleofas Calleros explains that this Mexican pamphlet has been published and distributed in Parral, Mexico, and that many Parralenses "were not too happy over the proposed settlement." The Mexican pamphlet, written by Edmundo Días Barrientos, was published in Cd. Juarez and sponsored by the District of Parral in Chihuahua, Mexico. See: Calleros Papers, MS231, box 34, folder 1.
9. Calleros Papers, MS231, box 33, folder 1
10. Calleros Papers, MS231, box 33, folder 13.
11. Just before Calleros' death in 1973, historian Oscar Martinez conducted an oral history with Cleofas Calleros. In that interview, Calleros tells this story. See: Interview with Cleofas Calleros by Oscar Martinez, "Interview No. 156," *Institute of Oral History*, University of Texas at El Paso (1972): 1-2.
12. Calleros Papers, MS231, box 32, folder 14; Calleros Papers, box 33, folder 2.
13. Calleros Papers, MS231, box 32, folder 14.
14. Calleros Papers, MS231, box 32, folder 14.
15. Calleros Papers, MS231, box 32, folder 14.
16. Calleros Papers, MS231, box 32, folder 14.
17. Calleros Papers, MS231, box 32, folder 14.
18. Calleros Papers, MS231, box 33, folder 2.

19. Calleros Papers, MS231, box 33, folder 2; Calleros Papers, MS231, box 33, folder 13.
20. Calleros Papers, MS231, box 33, folder 2.
21. Calleros Papers, MS231, box 32, folder 13.
22. Paul Kramer, "A Border Crosses," *The New Yorker*, September 20, 2014.
23. Paul Kramer, "A Border Crosses."
24. C.L. Sonnichsen, *Pass of the North: Four Centuries Along the Rio Grande*, (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1969), 70; Bryson, *The Land Where We Live*, 30.
25. For more on the racialization of Mexicans and Segundo Barrio along lines "filth" and "decay" see: Alexandra Minna Stern, "Buildings, Boundaries, and Bloods: Medicalization and Nation-Building on the U.S.-Mexico Border, 1910-1930," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 79.1 (1999):41-81; David Romo, *Ringside Seat to a Revolution: An Underground Cultural History of El Paso and Cd. Juárez, 1893-1923* (El Paso: Cinco Puntos Press, 2017).
26. Anglo El Paso, in other words, existed in its place of dominance only in relation to Segundo Barrio's place of racialized disempowerment. Producing a disempowered Segundo Barrio contributed to perpetuating and naturalizing the city's unequal social relations of racial dominance.
27. David R. Diaz, *Barrio Urbanism: Chicanos, Planning, and American Cities* (New York: Routledge, 2005); George Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place* (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 2011), 5.
28. Benjamin Marquez, *Power and Politics in a Chicano Barrio: A Study of Mobilization Efforts and Community Power in El Paso*, (Lanham and London: University Press of America, 1985), 53.
29. For more on Mexican American moderates during the 1960s, see: Guadalupe San Miguel Jr., *In the Midst of Radicalism: Mexican American Moderates during the Chicano Movement, 1960-1978*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2022).
30. Mercedes Lugo, "El Paso's Own Señor Cleofas Calleros," *Junior Historian*, December 1968, 25; "Advocates Destruction of El Paso Tenements," *El Paso Evening Post*, September 16, 1930; Cleofas Calleros, "Everyday Events," *El Paso Times*, June 20, 1952..
31. Calleros, "Everday Events."
32. In addition to problems involving el Chamizal, public opinion in El Paso at that time was against public housing and that the housing board to which Calleros was a part of was accused of socialism. See: Marquez, *Power and Politics in a Chicano Barrio*, 62.
33. Henry Yermillion, "Persons Born in Chamizal Zone May Be Citizens of Two Countries," *El Paso Times*, August 5, 1934.
34. "Chamizal Zone to be Surveyed," *El Paso Times*, October 26, 1937.
35. Though Calleros was unable to secure public housing in Chihuahuita, he was able to elsewhere in Segundo Barrio. On September 3, 1935, the Slum Clearance committee that Calleros was part of secured \$2,000,000 from the federal government to build public housing in South El Paso. With these funds, the commission built what is now the Alamito Garden public housing community on Tays and 3rd Avenue—and area in northeast Segundo Barrio. Calleros later referred to the Alamito as a "blessing" from his time on the commission. See: Calleros, "Everyday Events," *El Paso Times*.
36. Larry Rohter, "A Liquid Border Pays No Heed to Diplomacy," *New York Times*, September 26, 1987.
37. Cleofas Calleros, "All Talk, Little Done Until 1962 For Settlement," *El Paso Times*, September 25, 1964; "Terms of Submission. Proceedings in Chamizal case no. 4. Diplomatic correspondence," Volume 1, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1911: 1-554.
38. Donald W. Peters, "The Rio Grande Boundary Dispute in American Diplomacy," *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 54.4 (1951), 414.
39. Leon Metz, *El Paso Chronicles: A*

Password

Record of Historical Events in El Paso, Texas, (El Paso: Mangan Books, 1993), 212.

40. Clark S. Knowlton Papers, ACCN 0153: Box 5, Folder 2, Special Collections, The University of Utah

41. Calleros Papers, MS231, box 33, folder 13.

42. Cleofas Calleros, *El Paso Then and Now* Vol III (El Paso: American Printing Company, 1954), 28.

43. Translated from Spanish by the author. Original reads: "La question del Chamizal propiamente no afecta su propiedad, aunque, segun un mapa que se exhibe en Ciudad Juarez ultimamente, se dice que Mexico quiere reclamar desde la Calle Primera has el Sur. Esto es oficialmente incorrecto. La linea en consideracion comienza en la Calle Diez." See: Calleros papers, MS231, box 32, folder 13.

44. Nestor Valencia, interview by Michelle L. Gomilla, "Interview no. 844," Institute of Oral History, University of Texas at El Paso, 1994, 5.

45. Nestor Valencia, interview by Michelle L. Gomilla, "Interview no. 844," 5.

46. Donald Worster, *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity, and the Growth of the American West* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

47. Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1973), 5.

48. Manu Karuka, *Empire's Tracks: Indigenous Nations, Chinese Workers, and the Transcontinental Railroad* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019), 25.

49. Worster, *Rivers of Empire*, 56.

50. Donald Worster, *Rivers of Empire*, 56.

51. Michael Wines, "Mighty Rio Grande Now a Trickle Under Siege," *New York Times*, April 12, 2015.

52. Where the river begins in the San Juan Range of the Colorado Rockies, the Ute Peoples tend to and care for the river, and as it flows south through the state of New Mexico, the Pueblo and Apache Peoples have done the same. At El Paso, where it becomes in the U.S.-Mexico boundary

and flows through the ancestral lands of the Manso, Suma, Apache, Piro, and the Tigua/Ysleta del Sur Pueblo, the Rio Grande begins to curve in a south-easterly direction toward the Gulf of Mexico.

53. "Terms of Submission. Proceedings in Chamizal case no. 4. Diplomatic correspondence," 190.

54. Completed in 1916, Elephant Butte Dam and later the Caballo dam in New Mexico were built to harness the Río Grande through New Mexico, Texas, and Mexico.

55. George Natanson, "U.S. Moves on Cession of Chamizal," *Los Angeles Times*, July 19, 1964.

56. Gregory, Gladys, "The Chamizal Settlement: A View From El Paso," in *Password*, Vol. III, No. 4 (1963), 51.

57. "South of Border Was Once North," *New York Times*, September 26, 1987.

58. "Johnson and Diaz Formally Settle Boundary Dispute," *New York Times*, October 19, 1967.

59. Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo [Exchange copy], February 2, 1848; Perfected Treaties, 1778-1945; Record Group 11; General Records of the United States Government, 1778-1992; National Archives.

60. Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo [Exchange copy], February 2, 1848.

61. Raymond B. Craib, *Cartographic Mexico: A History of State Fixations and Fugitive Landscapes* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004), 8.

62. Craib, *Cartographic Mexico*, 88.

63. While the historical record demonstrates that the joint commission repeatedly failed to bend the Río Grande to their will, some historians of the Texas-Mexico boundary insist that "Officials chose the Rio Grande [as the U.S.-Mexico boundary] for the same reason rivers so often serve as boundaries: because on maps of unfamiliar (at least to non-natives) territory, rivers are often the most, if not the only, conspicuous feature, making them convenient points of reference." Such rationalizes serve to naturalize geopolitical borders and

distract what from other historians have long argued: that the writers of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and the politicians and businessmen they represented set the new southern U.S. boundary along the Río Grande in 1848 not because of its conspicuous features, but because of the trade and profit that the river guaranteed. See: Jeffrey M. Schulze, "The Chamizal Blues: El Paso, the Wayward River, and the Peoples in Between," *The Western Historical Quarterly* 43.3 (2012): 305; Martinez, Oscar. *Troublesome Border* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1988).

64. James Mueller, *Restless River: International Law and the Behavior of the Rio Grande*. (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1975), 58-62.

65. "Why Were Names Mysteriously Erased On U.S. Chamizal Map?" *The Southwestern* 2 no. 2, (1963): 14; Paula Rebert, *La Gran Línea: Mapping the United States-Mexico Boundary, 1849-1857* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 177.

C.J. Alvarez, *Border Land, Border Water: A History of Construction on the U.S.-Mexico Divide* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2019), 18; Muller, *Restless River*, 58-62.

66. Donald Meinig, *The Shaping of America: A Geographical Perspective on 500 Years of History Volume 2 Continental America, 1800-1867* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), 152.

67. Anglo Americans in El Paso, for instance, insisted that the 1848 and 1852 channel locations were interchangeable and therefore that el Chamizal was the rightful possession of the United States. Mexico insisted the opposite. See: Terms of submission, Proceedings in Chamizal case no. 4; "Believes Rio Grande Occupies 1848 Channel," *El Paso Times*, May 15, 1963; Chamizal Title Company Papers MS978: Box 1, Series 1, Folder 8, Arizona Historical Society, Tucson, Arizona; Harry Hewitt, "Mexican-United States Boundary Commission," *Texas State Historical Association Handbook of Texas*, Texas

State Historical Association: <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/mexican- united-states-boundary-commission>

68. "Why Were Names Mysteriously Erased On U.S. Chamizal Map?" *The Southwestern* 2 no. 2, (1963): 14.

69. Rebert, *La Gran Línea*, 177.

70. "Terms of Submission. Proceedings in Chamizal case no. 4, 109.

71. Rebert, *La Gran Línea*, 196.

72. Mexican maps of these meanderings can be found in *El Chamizal, solución complete: album gráfico* by M. Quesada Brandi. American maps of these meanderings at el Chamizal can be found at the Chamizal National Memorial and in the following source: Donald Peters, "The Rio Grande Boundary Dispute in American Diplomacy," in *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 54.4 (1951): 412-429.

73. Kathleen Kirby, "Re:Mapping Subjectivity: Cartographic vision and the limits of politics," in *BodySpace: Destabilizing geographies of gender and sexuality*, edited by Nancy Duncan (London and New York: Routledge, 1996): 47.

74. Kirby, "Re:Mapping Subjectivity," 48.

75. Kirby, "Re: Mapping Subjectivity," 49.

76. The canon historiography of El Pasos often mentions the Chamizal Dispute, but glosses over the key role of el Chamizal in the making of what is now El Paso, Texas. See: W.H. Timmons, *El Paso: A Borderlands History* (El Paso: The University of Texas at El Paso, 1990); Leon C. Metz, *Border: The U.S.-Mexico Line* (El Paso: Mangan Books, 1989); C.L. Sonnichsen, *Pass of the North: Four Centuries on the Rio Grande Volume 1 1529-1917* (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1968); Mario, Garcia, *Desert Immigrants: The Mexicans of El Paso, 1880-1920* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), 143.

77. Craib, *Cartographic Mexico*, 11.

78. Ray Daguerre, Interviewer Oscar J. Martinez "Interview No. 185," Institute of Oral History, University of Texas, El Paso, 1975.

79. Mueller, *Restless River*, 22; *Reports of International Arbitral Awards*, The Chamizal Case (Mexico, United States) June 15, 1911, Volume XI, United Nations (2006), 329; "Chamizal," U.S. Department of Interior, National Park Service, 1976.
80. [Opinion of Attorney General Caleb Cushing, November 11, 1856], Cushing to McClelland, November 11, 1856, Appendix, U.S. Case, II, 5559; Mueller, *Restless River*, 37.
81. James J. Walsh, "The Federal Common Law of Accretion: A New Element in Property Law," *Louisiana Law Review* 35.1 (1974), 182.
82. Walsh, "The Federal Common Law of Accretion," 183-4.
83. Walsh, "The Federal Common Law of Accretion," 183-4.
84. Walsh, "The Federal Common Law of Accretion," 184.
85. Muller, *Restless River*, 38.
86. Only later in the 1950s would the United States acknowledge in recently declassified federal documents that Cushing's opinion was not as clear as it may have seemed. "If only two kinds of changes were meant—avulsion and erosion—then any changes not avulsion must be erosion," reads a 1956 report. "But if more than two classes of changes were intended (as Mexico later argued)," the report continues, "an erosion that was not slow and gradual might constitute a third class of change to be treated like avulsion." See: Records Relating to the Chamizal Dispute with Mexico, 1947-1963 (A1 5145): Box 1, Chamizal 1956, National Archives and Records; Don M. Coerver, "From Morteritos to Chamizal: The U.S.-Mexican Boundary Treaty of 1884," *Red River Valley Historical Review* 2.4 (1975): 532.
87. Kenneth Duane Yeilding, "The Chamizal Dispute: An Exercise in Arbitration," (Dissertation: Texas Tech University, 1973,) 29.
88. J.J. Bowden, "Spanish and Mexican Land Grants in the Chihuahuan Acquisition," (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1971), 104.
89. John G. Johnson, "Ponce de León Land Grant," Texas State Historical Association," <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/ponce-de-leon-land-grant>; J. J. Bowden, *The Ponce de León Land Grant* (Southwestern Studies Monograph No. 24, El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1969).
90. Bowden, *Spanish and Mexican Land Grants*, 105; "Lands in Dispute. The Campbell Real Estate Company Et Als. vs. Mexican Claimants," Chamizal Title Company Papers MS978: Box 8, Series 3, Folder 72, Arizona Historical Society, Tucson, Arizona; Bowden, *The Ponce de León Land Grant*; "In the Matter of the Claim of certain Mexican Citizens to Lands on the Rio Grande known by the name of District of 'El Chamizal,'" Republic of Mexico Secretary of Foreign Relations, Library of Congress, 14.
91. Bowden, *Spanish and Mexican Land Grants*, 105.
92. "Terms of Submission," 139.
93. "In the Matter of the Claim of certain Mexican Citizens to Lands on the Rio Grande," 9, 14.
94. Jorge A. Vargas, "El Caso del Chamizal: Sus Peculiaridades Juridicas," (Dissertation: Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico Facultad de Derecho y Ciencias Sociales, Mexico D.F., 1963): 38; "Papers Trace El Chamizal Back to 1818," *El Paso Herald-Post*, October 27, 1967; Eugene Semmes Ives Collection, MS 1381: Box 7, Folder 55, Arizona Historical Society, Tucson, Arizona.
95. "Chihuahuaita Historic District," *Digie*, El Paso Museum of History, 29 October 2014; Metz, Leon (1999). *El Paso: Guided Through Time*. El Paso, Texas: Mangan Books; Victor M. Guzman Garcia, "The Legacy of Captain Alonso Garcia I.," *Password* 43, no. 4 (1998): 166; Vargas, "El Caso del Chamizal".
96. "In the Matter of the Claim of certain Mexican Citizens to Lands on the Rio Grande known by the name of District of 'El Chamizal,'" 9.
97. "In the Matter of the Claim of certain Mexican Citizens to Lands on the Rio

Grande known by the name of District of 'El Chamizal,'" 125.

98. "In the Matter of the Claim of certain Mexican Citizens to Lands on the Rio Grande known by the name of District of 'El Chamizal,'" 127.

99. Garcia, "The Legacy," 170.

100. "Magoffin Historic District," United States Department of the Interior: National Park Service: National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, August 26, 2016; Chamizal Title Company Papers, MS978, Arizona Historical Society, Tucson.

101. "In the Matter of the Claim of certain Mexican Citizens to Lands on the Rio Grande known by the name of District of 'El Chamizal,'" 124.

102. Craib, *Cartographic Mexico*, 45.

103. For these landholding, mostly elite Mexican citizens in Partido Chamizal, dispossession had to do with their own racial claims to Spanish whiteness and the Mexican state's settler colonial claims of possession and legitimacy upon the land—which was similarly rooted in landed property and the desecration of Apache, Manso, and Suma claims to this region.

104. "In the Matter of the Claim of certain Mexican Citizens to Lands on the Rio Grande known by the name of District of 'El Chamizal,'" 125; Garcia, "The Legacy," 166.

105. Victor Guzman Papers, Chamizal National Memorial Archives, El Paso, Texas.

106. Guzman Papers, Chamizal National Memorial Archives.

107. Guzman Papers, Chamizal National Memorial Archives.

108. "Terms of Submission," 184.

109. "Terms of Submission," 184.

110. "Terms of submission," 109.

111. "Terms of Submission," 110.

112. "Terms of Submission," 110; Chamizal Title Company Papers, 1733-1908, MS 978, Arizona Historical Society, Tucson, Arizona.

113. "Terms of submission," 115.

114. Craib, *Cartographic Mexico*, 88-89.

115. Lawyers representing Mexican claimants to el Chamizal argued that the accuracy of Mills' resurvey was highly debatable and was legal grounds for dispute. See: "In the Matter of the Claim of certain Mexican Citizens to Lands on the Rio Grande known by the name of District of 'El Chamizal,'" 37-39; Chamizal Title Company Papers, MS978, box 1, series 1, folder 8, 9.

116. "Terms of submission," 107-8.

117. Those seven witnesses were Jesus Serna, Ynocente Ochoa, Esperidion Provencio, José M. Flores, Samuel Schutz, Joseph Magoffin, and Mariano Samangiego. See: "In the Matter of the Claim of certain Mexican Citizens to Lands on the Rio Grande known by the name of District of 'El Chamizal,'" 82, 89-93; "Terms of Submission," 117-138.

118. In the Matter of the Claim of certain Mexican Citizens to Lands on the Rio Grande known by the name of District of 'El Chamizal,'" 68.

119. "In the Matter of the Claim of certain Mexican Citizens to Lands on the Rio Grande known by the name of District of 'El Chamizal,'" 71.

120. "In the Matter of the Claim of certain Mexican Citizens to Lands on the Rio Grande known by the name of District of 'El Chamizal,'" 71, 80.

121. "In the Matter of the Claim of certain Mexican Citizens to Lands on the Rio Grande known by the name of District of 'El Chamizal,'" 75.

122. "In the Matter of the Claim of certain Mexican Citizens to Lands on the Rio Grande known by the name of District of 'El Chamizal,'" 75.

123. "In the Matter of the Claim of certain Mexican Citizens to Lands on the Rio Grande known by the name of District of 'El Chamizal,'" 82.

124. "Terms of submission," 118.

125. "In the Matter of the Claim of certain Mexican Citizens to Lands on the Rio Grande known by the name of District of 'El Chamizal,'" 68, 70.

126. "In the Matter of the Claim of certain Mexican Citizens to Lands on the Rio

- Grande known by the name of District of 'El Chamizal," 91.
127. "Terms of submission," 118.
128. "In the Matter of the Claim of certain Mexican Citizens to Lands on the Rio Grande known by the name of District of 'El Chamizal," 81.
129. "Terms of submission," 123.
130. "Terms of submission," 141.
131. Rebert, *La Gran Línea*, 192.
132. "Terms of submission," 191.
133. "Terms of submission," 191.
134. "Terms of submission," 211.
135. Anson Mills, *My Life* (Washington D.C.: Press of Byron S. Adams, 1918), 294.
136. S.L.A Marshall Papers, MS186. box 93, folder 1540, C.L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Dept., University of Texas at El Paso Library.
137. In a recent interview, El Paso historian Fred Morales identified Santiago Alvarado as Segundo Barrio's first settler after receiving a Mexican land grant in the area in 1834. Though I disagree with Morales here, his research on Alvarado is noteworthy. See: Natassia Bonyanpour, "More than a century old, many still call El Segundo Barrio home," *NewspaperTree*, March 12, 2016: <https://web.archive.org/web/20160312081859/http://newspapertree.com/articles/2013/11/15/more-than-a-century-old-many-still-call-el-segundo-barrío-home>; MS978: Box 7 S. 2 F.56.
138. Chamizal Title Company Papers, MS978, box 7, series 2, folder 56.
139. Fred Morales, "Chronology of the Segundo Barrio Volume 1: 1800-1920," 24.
140. "In the Matter of the Claim of certain Mexican Citizens to Lands on the Rio Grande known by the name of District of 'El Chamizal," 110-111.
141. "In the Matter of the Claim of certain Mexican Citizens to Lands on the Rio Grande known by the name of District of 'El Chamizal," 71, 116-118
142. "In the Matter of the Claim of certain Mexican Citizens to Lands on the Rio Grande known by the name of District of 'El Chamizal," 117.
143. "In the Matter of the Claim of certain Mexican Citizens to Lands on the Rio Grande known by the name of District of 'El Chamizal," 117.
144. Chamizal Title Company Papers, MS978, box 7, series 2, folder 63.
145. "In the Matter of the Claim of certain Mexican Citizens to Lands on the Rio Grande known by the name of District of 'El Chamizal," 105.
146. "In the Matter of the Claim of certain Mexican Citizens to Lands on the Rio Grande known by the name of District of 'El Chamizal," 105.
147. For more on the strategies and practices of U.S. geographic domination in Texas and its layered history of Mexican and Indigenous dispossession and displacement see: David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987).
148. In 2019, Nestor Valencia gave a presentation at the Chamizal National Memorial to celebrate National Hispanic Heritage Month titled "El Chamizal and El Segundo Barrio." As part of that presentation, he began by saying: "Fifty-five years ago, the land that we are on was really nothing but a vacant piece of land." Not only is this statement factually incorrect, but it also reifies colonial narratives of terra nullius that this region was a vacant hinterlands. I was present for Valencia's presentation and have a personal video recording of this presentation.
149. Metz, *El Paso Chronicles*, 155.
150. Chamizal Title Company Papers, 1733-1908, MS 978, box 1, series 1, folder 1.
151. In his book *Desert Immigrants*, Mario Garcia discusses the substandard housing, uneven infrastructure, and sanitation issues of Chihuahuita that marked the area as a Mexican slum. See: Mario, Garcia, *Desert Immigrants*, 143.
152. Chamizal (General), Southwest Collection, Border Heritage Center, El Paso Public Library.
153. "The Chamizal Settlement," Department of State, Washington D.C.,

July 1963.

154. "Chamizal Arbitration Court Announces Its Decision," *El Paso Morning Times*, June 16, 1911.

155. Rebert, *La Gran Línea*, 191.

156. "Reports of International Arbitral Awards/Recueil Des Sentences Arbitrales," The Chamizal Case (Mexico, United States) June 15, 1911. United Nations, 2006: www.internationalwaterlaw.org/cases/Chamizal_Arbitration.pdf

157. "Chamizal Arbitration Court Announces Its Decision," *El Paso Morning Times*, June 16, 1911.

158. Calleros Papers, MS231, box 32, folder 14.

159. Alan C. Lamborn and Stephen P. Memme, *Statecraft, Domestic Politics, and Foreign Policy Making: The El Chamizal Dispute*, (New York: Routledge, 2019), quoted on 62.

160. Though the Chamizal Treaty was not formally settled according to the law of accretion and the 1884 Treaty, a Mexican treatise published in 2015 argued that avulsion was the basis for the settlement. This treatise not only contextualizes the settlement within the shared discourse concerning other boundary adjudications along the U.S.-Mexico border, but also reinscribes a misguided colonial insistence that the river's meanderings can only fall under one of two categories. See: José De Jesús Uribe, Et. Al, *Derecho Romano* (2015).

161. Charles Hillinger, "Park Blossom in Once-Disputed Area," *Los Angeles Times*, September 15, 1974.

162. Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon, 1995), 72.

163. Francisco Ortiz, "Thinking Out Loud: Chamizal Land Owner Protests," *El Paso Herald-Post*, August 9, 1963.

164. Francisco Ortiz, "Thinking Out Loud: Chamizal Land Owner Protests," *El Paso Herald-Post*, August 9, 1963.

165. Calleros Papers, MS213, box 32, folder 13.

166. Calleros Papers, MS213, box 32, folder 14.

167. Calleros Papers, MS231, box 33, folder 1.

168. Cleofas Calleros, "The Agreement: Opinions and Discussions, June 1962-May 1963, Vol 1," El Paso Historical Society, El Paso, Texas; Calleros Papers, MS231, box 32, folder 13.

169. Calleros Papers, MS231, box 32, folder 14.

170. de Hinojosa, "El Río Grande as Pedagogy."

171. Translated from Spanish by the author. Original reads: "Elvira reunió a un buen grupo de la adición Rio Linda para que se presentaran ante el Ambajador Mann para presentar su protesta de que no querían ser mexicanos ni que se les expropiara sus propiedaea, y mucho menos devolverlas a México." See: Calleros Papers, MS231, box 32, folder 14.

172. Calleros Papers, MS231, box 33, folder 1.

173. Elvira Escajeda, who successfully organized the condemned Chamizal barrios and renegotiated the terms of their displacement according to the residents' demands, is remembered as the "voice of the barrio" and champion of Chamizal residents. See: de Hinojosa, "El Río Grande as Pedagogy;" Alana de Hinojosa, "Elvira 'Vila' Villa Escajeda, Champion of Residents in Landmark Chamizal Dispute, Dies at 102," El Paso News, January 18, 2022.

174. Calleros Papers, MS231, box 32, folder 14.

175. Emphasis added by the author. Calleros Papers, MS231, box 32, folder 14.

176. de Hinojosa, "El Río Grande as Pedagogy," 733.

177. Calleros Papers, MS231, box 32, folder 13.

178. Calleros Papers, MS231, box 32, folder 13.

179. Calleros Papers, MS231, box 32, folder 13.

180. Calleros Papers, MS231, box 32, folder 13.

181. Calleros Papers, MS231, box 33, folder 1.

182. Martin Paredes, "Segundo Barrio:

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Decades of Gentrification,” *El Paso News*, January 19, 2022.

183. “Six-Lane Highway Due in Chamizal,” *El Paso Herald-Post*, October 22, 1963; “Chamizal Highway Approved,” *El Paso Herald-Post*, September 4, 1965; Naveena Sadasivam, “Alleging ‘Environmental Racism,’ El Paso Activists File Civil Rights Complaint Against School District,” *Texas Observer*, April 3, 2018: www.texasobserver.org/alleging-environmental-racism-el-paso-activists-file-civil-rights-complaint-against-school-district/

184. Clark S. Knowlton Papers ACCNT 0153: Box 5, Folder 2; City of El Paso, Department of Planning, “Four Point Program” (1964), 1; “The Chamizal International Border Improvement Project,” Department of Planning, El Paso (1964), Lyndon B. Johnson Library.

185. Between 1955 and 1966, urban

renewal projects displaced more than 300,000 people, the burden falling disproportionately on people of color. See: “Renewing Inequality: Family Displacements through Urban Renewal, 1950-1966,” Digital Scholar Lab, University of Richmond: <https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/l/#view=0/0/1&viz=scatterplot&text=sources>

186. Susie Aquilina, “Beto O’Rourke Built His Career on Driving Out Low-Income Mexican Communities,” Truthout, August 28, 2019: www.truthout.org/articles/beto-orourke-built-his-career-on-driving-out-low-income-mexican-communities/

187. Calleros Papers, “Slums,” Southwest Vertical Files, El Paso Public Library.

188. Lugo, “El Paso’s Own Señor Cleofas Calleros,” 24; Only In El Paso, “Cleofas Calleros: An El Paso Visionary,” YouTube Video, 3:28, August 24, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aNipHclri5o>



Book Review

Doña Tules: Santa Fe's Courtesan and Gambler

By Mary J. Straw Cook

Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2021. 173 pp. Paper, \$19.95.

Author and New Mexican Mary J. Straw Cook has written several books on the history of the southwest. Her latest, *Doña Tules: Santa Fe's Courtesan and Gambler*, chronicles the life of one of New Mexico's most notorious gamblers, Doña Tules. While Cook is able to portray Tules as a successful entrepreneur and land owner, *Doña Tules* rarely delves into her exploits as a gambler or the cardrooms and bordellos that she operated.

This biography presents several challenges as education was not compulsory during this period and few of the protagonists left written records. Yet Cook was able to provide an in-depth look at Doña Tules and her family. She utilizes a diverse assortment of secondary sources including books, journals, and articles as well as a number of primary sources. To provide a comprehensive background Cook also uses newspapers from the era, letters, government documents, as well as personal interviews that she conducted. Most notable are the use of archival material on the period including collections in New Mexico, Colorado, Louisiana, Texas, and Mexico.

As an avid poker player, I read *Doña Tules* with high expectations. Unfortunately, the book offers very little exploration into her life as a gambler, aside from her reputed success. Rather, Cook offers a chronicle of the life of Doña Tules. Because of her gambling acumen she is able to acquire a substantial amount of wealth, property, and political influence. Indeed, as American troops occupied the area near Santa Fe in the 1840s, their financial resources quickly dwindled. Facing a dire shortage of money, American officers sought, and received, a substantial loan from one of the few individuals in the region that held considerable financial resources: Doña Tules (p. 44).

The eponymous *Doña Tules* provides an account of a young woman coming of age and experiencing financial success in the borderlands as the region



shifted from Mexican to American control. The book begins by describing the humble origins of Tules and her family in Sonora, Mexico at the turn of the nineteenth century. Cook ably describes the hardships they faced in an arid region that experienced unpredictable agricultural production and suffered from frequent incursions by nearby Native Americans. Cook asserts that this arduous upbringing helped shape Tules into a perceptive and cunning gambler later in life. Despite her family's modest resources, they were able to move into Mexico's northern territory near Santa Fe. Soon after relocating Tules married and tried unsuccessfully to start a family. The loss of several infant children deeply affected Tules and prompted her to adopt and raise several children throughout her life.

The second and third chapters detail another significant event that shaped the future of Doña Tules. Living on the Santa Fe Trail, she was able to capitalize on the gold rush from nearby Oso Springs (p. 14). This provided a steady stream of hardworking miners that had recently acquired a substantial sum of money and were ready to eat, drink, and gamble. While an adept gambler, Tules' game of choice seemed to be monte, a popular card game in the region. Her expertise was not limited to gambling; to run a successful cardroom, one had to be familiar with the current rate of exchange for multiple types of currency. Cook estimates that it was not uncommon for games to include Mexican pesos, French francs, American dollars, and gold (p. 29).

Chapters four and five mark another turning point, as the United States gained control of the region following the Mexican-American War. Cook notes that the American military presence in Santa Fe increased the wealth and influence of Doña Tules and allowed her to continue to gain property in the area. Specifically, Tules was able to obtain several adjoining buildings near the Plaza in Santa Fe. This allowed her to deal monte in her own establishments and move large amounts of specie from one location to another without leaving the safety of her property (p. 55).

The final chapters examine the last few years of her life, including the drafting of her will. Her last will and testament proves to be a fascinating document. Despite having no experience speaking or writing in the language, the will is written in English. Justifiably, she leaves her property to her immediate family, and yet, as Cook notes, the amount of property Tules accumulated is truly remarkable. Also noteworthy were the executors of her will; distinguished gentlemen from New Mexico including a reverend. This is significant because Doña Tules was buried in *La Parroquia*, a Catholic church in Santa Fe. This was not without controversy as her religious burial drew complaints from some of the locals because of her chosen professions. Despite this criticism she was able to have an ornate religious ceremony that matched her life in extravagance.

Although *Doña Tules* does not include animated or titillating escapades in the cardroom or the bedroom of New Mexico's most notorious courtesan and

gambler, the author does provide a glimpse into the life of Doña Tules. She is able to overcome personal tragedy and capitalize on the local gold rush as a shrewd gambler and businesswoman. Her success allowed her to bestow a substantial amount of wealth and property and cement her personal legacy into southwestern lore. While lacking in tales of gambling exploits, Cook provides a compelling narrative on life in the borderlands as New Mexico transitioned from Mexican to American control.

— *Review by Joseph Seagrove*
University of Texas, El Paso
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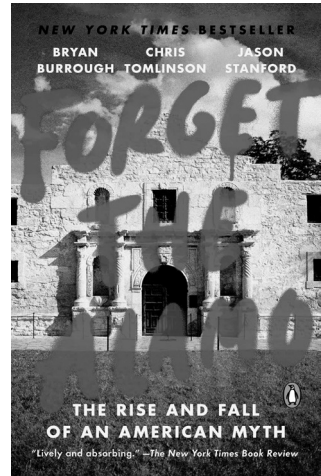
Book Review

Forget the Alamo: The Rise and Fall of an American Myth

*By Brian Burrough, Chris Tomlinson, and Jason Stanford
New York: Penguin Press, 2021*

For well over a century, the Battle of the Alamo has represented the ultimate touchstone of traditional Texas (Anglo) identity while occupying an oversized role in Texas history. *Forget the Alamo*, the controversial new book with the deliberately provocative title, provides a fresh view of this famous military engagement, based on recent scholarship. More importantly, though, as the subtitle indicates, authors Brian Burrough, Chris Tomlinson, and Jason Stanford directly challenge the older and rather simplistic popular interpretations of the battle and the larger Texas Revolt, which they contend passed off myths as realities and created a distorted, incomplete version of history that badly needs correction. To them, the American settlers' desire to permanently protect the institution of slavery constituted the underlying cause of the 1836 revolt. Their rejection of what they term the old "Heroic Anglo Narrative" in favor of this revisionist interpretation set off a political firestorm in July, 2021, when an outraged Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick forced the state history museum to cancel an online presentation by the authors, accusing them of publishing a "fact-free rewriting of TX history." Ironically, Patrick's action drew greater national attention to the book, boosted its sales, and briefly propelled the volume to a spot on the New York Times' bestseller list.

The first section of the book provides an updated account with new details about the famous siege and capture of the Alamo. Next, Burrough, Tomlinson, and Stanford examine the larger Texas Revolution, rejecting the traditional interpretation of the revolt as a moral struggle between freedom and tyranny. Instead, the authors expand on their revisionist thesis that the desire to fully protect racial slavery, the foundation of the Texas cotton economy, from a hostile Mexican government represented the "true underlying cause" of the rebellion, although other factors affected



the actual timing of its outbreak. The authors then explain how the Alamo compound and the story of the defenders' sacrifice were surprisingly ignored by most Texans for the rest of the century. Only in the early 1900s were the not yet sacred Alamo grounds saved from destruction by two San Antonio women--Adina de Zavala and Clara Driscoll--and eventually turned over for preservation to the Daughters of the Republic of Texas (DRT). During the subsequent decades renewed interest in the 1836 battle among Anglo Texans inspired patriotic writers to publish the traditional accounts that most of us older Texans grew up with, a storyline of "heroic" defenders, evil Mexicans, and freedom-loving Anglo Americans. In the 1950s a popular three-part Walt Disney television series about Davy Crockett and John Wayne's 1960 epic blockbuster (and box-office flop) "The Alamo" combined to elevate what had previously been a regional Texas heroic saga into what the authors characterize as a Cold War meta-narrative of American freedom.

Later in the 1960s, "Alamo Revisionism" offered the first major challenge to the "Heroic Anglo Narrative" but achieved only limited success outside the academic world. In the early 2000s critics questioned the competency of the DRT to properly preserve the complex. Eventually in 2015 the General Land Office (GLO) revoked the Daughters' custody. Working with various local organizations the GLO then announced plans to "reimagine" the Alamo and spend \$400 million to build an inclusive world class facility that would triple tourist visits. A new museum would feature artifacts collected by British pop star Phil Collins, many of which the authors state are "of highly questionable authenticity." But behind the scenes political rivalries and the arrival of the coronavirus pandemic temporarily prevented work on the proposed facility until August, 2021, after the book was published.

Burrough, Tomlinson, and Stanford conclude that the Alamo is of declining cultural relevance today, since "most young Texans" and Mexican Americans of all ages do not identify with the old heroic narrative. They contend that "it's time to forget the Alamo, or at least the whitewashed story, and start telling the history that includes everyone." As is often the case with revisionist history, the authors sometimes push their thesis a little too aggressively, but they do successfully demonstrate that the protection of racial slavery was one of the most important factors influencing the Texas Revolt. Written in a casual and lively style, *Forget the Alamo* makes a strong case for a sensitive reexamination of Texas History that will speak to the twenty-first century concerns of the state's increasingly diverse population.

— *Review by Charles H. Martin*

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