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Introduction

The land border between the United States and Mexico is hard to miss these days. It rises out of the Pacific Ocean in the form of metal pilings that cast a shadow across a beach where families gather and Border Patrol jeeps leave tracks in the sand. It then cuts east across coastal bluffs until a dense tangle of traffic erupts around it at the San Ysidro port of entry. There, helicopters circle overhead and street vendors wind their way through the long lines of cars that wait to pass through an array of electronic scanners and vehicle barriers and to be inspected by a host of customs and immigration officials. This scene is repeated again at towns along the length of the boundary line—at Otay Mesa, Tecate, Calexico, Nogales, and other ports of entry where border crossers and buildings crowd the line. But for most of its length the border stands lonely of human activity, save for the barriers erected to prevent crossings—a patchwork of steel mesh, picket fencing, vehicle barriers, and barbed wire that rise above the desert floor marking the boundary line's course from the Pacific Ocean to the Rio Grande.[1]

Although some stretches of the border are still marked by no more than a five-strand barbed-wire fence that can easily be cut or climbed over, it is the image of an imposing physical barrier that comes to mind when most people think of the U.S.-Mexico border today. Walls and fences have become both physical realities and metaphors for the stark divide between the United States and Mexico and the attempts to control undocumented immigration and illegal drug trafficking that many people associate with the border.

But the border has a history. In the nineteenth century there were no border fences. The U.S. government did not prevent Mexican immigrants from crossing the border or even record their entries. In 1900 the U.S. and Mexican officials who patrolled the streets of border towns were occupied with collecting customs duties, not chasing drug runners or migrants. In 1870 there were few border towns west of El Paso and Apaches challenged the United States and Mexico for control of the sparsely settled borderlands. Just a few decades before that, this border did not exist at all.

This book is a history of how and why the border changed. Focusing on the western border between the United States and Mexico from its

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creation in 1848 through the early years of the Great Depression, it traces the transformation of the once-unmarked boundary line into a space of gates, fences, and patrols that allowed the easy passage of some people, animals, and goods, while restricting the movement of others. It tells the story of how the border shifted from a line on a map to a clearly marked and policed boundary where state agents attempted to regulate who and what entered the nation.

The history of the border began in the early nineteenth century with a collective act of imagination. Long before the border existed as a physical or legal reality it began to take form in the minds of Mexicans and Americans who looked to maps of North America to think about what their republics were and what they might someday become. Their competing territorial visions brought the United States and Mexico to war in 1846. Less than two years later, the border emerged from the crucible of that war. With U.S. soldiers occupying the Mexican capital, a group of Mexican and American diplomats redrew the map of North America. In the east, they chose a well-known geographic feature, the Rio Grande, settling a decade-old debate about Texas's southern border and dividing the communities that had long lived along the river. In the west, they did something different; they drew a line across a map and conjured up an entirely new space where there had not been one before.

The western border stands out as being entirely a creation of the U.S. and Mexican nation-states. Unlike the eastern half of the border, which followed the course of the Rio Grande, the desert border running from west of El Paso to the Pacific Ocean did not correspond to any previously existing geographic feature. In 1848 U.S. and Mexican officials determined its location by simply drawing straight lines between a few geographically important points on a map—El Paso, the Gila River, the junction of the Colorado and Gila rivers, and San Diego Bay. The one part of this boundary line that corresponded to a natural geographic feature, the Gila River, was made obsolete by the renegotiation of the border in the Gadsden Treaty of 1853. From that point on, with the exception of a small stretch of the boundary line that runs along the Colorado River, the western border was made up of a series of imaginary lines.

The delimitation of the western half of the boundary line created an entirely new space in the west. The Rio Grande had drawn people to its banks for trade, travel, and settlement long before it became part of an international border, but on the site of the western border there had simply been no *there* there before the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. In the years following the boundary line's creation, government agents would mark the desert border with monuments, cleared strips, and, eventually, fences to make it a more visible and controllable dividing line.[2] Although the treaty negotiators had known very little about the lands they divided

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with this line, with a stroke of the pen they began to transform them into sites of national significance and contested power.

This did not happen easily or all at once. The western boundary line runs through a region of mountains and deserts where water is often scarce and travel can be treacherous. From the Rio Grande it cuts west through a landscape of high-desert grasslands, rugged mountains, and seasonal river valleys. Not far from the point where it begins its diagonal trajectory toward the Colorado River, the border enters the Sonoran Desert, an arid expanse where temperatures can rise and fall by more than fifty degrees in a single day. The Colorado River provides one last respite before the boundary line continues across the desert and through the craggy mountains of the Peninsular Range to the Pacific Ocean.[3]

This is a demanding environment in which unprepared hikers and immigrants still lose their lives today. It was similarly perilous for the U.S. and Mexican officials who were first sent to survey the boundary line in the 1850s. Accustomed to the more well-watered and densely settled landscapes of the eastern United States and central Mexico, few of these men imagined that this unfamiliar territory in which they sweated, toiled, and repeatedly lost their way would ever attract a substantial population or require much government oversight. To the contrary, wrote one of the members of the Joint United States and Mexican Boundary Commission, "much of this country, that by those residing at a distance is imagined to be a perfect paradise, is a sterile waste, utterly worthless for any purpose than to constitute a barrier or natural line of demarcation between two neighboring nations."[4]

But history would prove them wrong. Rather than repelling people, the boundary line would draw people to it. Over the next eighty years the western border would experience dramatic changes and take on new meanings as a result of historical developments in the region, the continent, and the world. Shaped by the forces of capitalism and the expansion of state power, the "sterile waste" would become at different times a marker of military sovereignty, a site of transborder trade, a home to binational communities, a customs and immigration checkpoint, a divide between political and legal regimes, and even, at times, a battlefield. What began as a line on a map became a space of evolving and multiple meanings and forms.

The transformation of the border began with the work of the boundary commission but quickly drew an array of state agents and private actors to the boundary line. Even as the boundary surveys went forward, U.S. and Mexican soldiers battled to establish military sovereignty over the line. To do so they had to defeat both Apache Indians who exercised military dominion over the border region and American and European filibusters who imagined that they could build empires of their own in

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the borderlands. It was only with their defeat that the western boundary line became a clear marker of military authority.

This conquest of the borderlands made it possible for transnational capitalists to transform the region. As ranchers, miners, investors, laborers, and railroad builders arrived in the borderlands in the late nineteenth century, they incorporated the border into a landscape of property, trade, and towns. In this new capitalist context, the boundary line took on significance as a divide between legal regimes and a customs and immigration checkpoint. The U.S. and Mexican nation-states dispatched officers to enforce national customs and immigration laws, and smugglers, immigrants, and businessmen began to develop both legal and extralegal ways to get around them. Yet at the same time that government agents began to carve out a space of state surveillance on the boundary line, growing numbers of local people also claimed the line through the construction of ranches, railroads, businesses, and homes. By the early twentieth century, a number of new border towns had emerged as busy sites of commerce, community, and government oversight.

While social and commercial exchanges would continue to define the border, by the second decade of the twentieth century, the nation-states' presence on the boundary line expanded dramatically and the border became increasingly significant as a divide between Mexicans and Americans. The change began with the first battles of the Mexican Revolution in 1910. Over the next ten years the Mexican Revolution and World War I ruptured transborder ties and temporarily turned border towns into battlefields. These conflicts, along with the decline in U.S.-Mexican relations and the concerns about national security that they created, also had more long-term effects on the border. During the war years, both nation-states initiated heightened crossing restrictions, dispatched soldiers to patrol the line, and built fences between border towns. While the war's end saw many of the restrictions lapse and most of the soldiers sent home, the fences continued to define the border and divide transborder communities. By the 1930s these fences, along with the other parts of the border control apparatus, had become firmly entrenched on the boundary line where government officials put them to use in the service of new state priorities, including the regulation of American morality and the restriction of Mexican immigration. The legacy of this early version of the modern border control apparatus and the United States' imperfect attempts to use it to control Mexican immigration and smuggling are still evident on the border today.

However, while both the U.S. and Mexican governments gradually expanded their presence and power on the border over the course of its history, this is not a history of how either nation-state managed to close the once-open border, but rather of how the border evolved, often into

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forms and meanings that neither nation-state could predict or fully control. The boundary line began as a means for the United States and Mexico to claim territory they had yet to conquer. When both nation-states went to war with the region's Native inhabitants, it became significant as a jurisdictional boundary that determined where each military had the right and responsibility to operate. With the growth of trade and settlement the border emerged as a divide between property regimes and a customs barrier. It was only at the beginning of the twentieth century that the boundary line began to become the obstacle to immigration and the stark divide between the United States and Mexico that most people in the twenty-first century imagine it to be. The history of the western U.S.-Mexico border shows that while nation-states have always desired boundaries, the significance and shape of those borders have changed over time.

While much of this narrative highlights the dramatic transformations of the border between its creation and the emergence of the modern border control apparatus in the 1920s and 1930s, there are also continuous themes that run through it. History is always a balance between change and continuity, and the history of the border is no exception. Questions about the control of space, the negotiation of state sovereignty, and the significance of national identities have been entangled with the boundary line since its creation and continue to define the border today. Focusing on these themes not only helps us to understand the U.S.-Mexico border but also to gain broader insight into how nation-states and borders function.

Rather than a clear line that defined the limits of national territory and state power, the border was a space where categories blurred and power was compromised. These themes resonate with other histories of North American borderlands that are replete with "middle grounds," "fugitive landscapes," and "peoples in between."[5] This book builds on the work of a generation of borderlands historians who have explored histories of conquest and cultural interaction in the contact zones at the edges of empires and surrounding international boundaries. Blending Spanish colonial borderlands history with the analytical approaches of Native American, Chicano/a, and western history, recent borderlands histories have drawn attention to broad processes of conquest, colonization, and cultural interaction and exchange and have become models for transnational history.[6] However, as borderlands historians have emphasized historical processes that transcend national boundaries and have expanded their focus to include zones of interaction outside of the U.S. Southwest and Mexican north, they have often treated the border itself as an irrelevant or incidental part of the borderlands.[7] By contrast, I emphasize the centrality of the boundary line in the processes of market expansion, con-

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quest, state building, and identity formation with which many borderlands historians are concerned.[8]

Although located at the periphery of the nation, this border, like boundaries all over the world, was central to state projects of territorial sovereignty, economic development, and the construction of the boundaries of the body politic.[9] In the years following the creation of the boundary line in 1848, the U.S. and Mexican nation-states expanded dramatically, extending their reach to the outer limits of their territory and into new regulatory arenas. As they grew, they set increasingly ambitious and wide-ranging objectives for the border and simultaneously improved their ability to achieve these goals. While in the 1850s it had been all either nation could do just to survey the boundary line and build monuments to mark its course, by the early twentieth century both nation-states had large numbers of agents and physical structures on the line that allowed them to collect tariffs, inspect prospective immigrants, arrest smugglers, and perform other duties that brought the boundary line into closer conformity with state goals.

The boundary the nation-states created was conditional. Depending on government policies, it denied access to some people, goods, and animals while easing the entry of others. Neither government set out to close the border, but rather to improve its ability to manipulate spatial controls to reflect state priorities. In pursuit of the perfection of this system, both nation-states adopted a range of spatial controls in the form of both physical parts of the built environment, such as boundary markers, cleared strips, customs houses, and fences, and government regulations, including immigration restrictions, customs regulations, and international law, which channeled and limited transborder movement.

As a result, throughout its history the changes in the border's meaning and the nation-states' power were reflected in the transformation of the border's physical form. Boundary surveys imprinted the imaginary line of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo on maps and marked it with boundary monuments on the ground. When capitalists invested in land, mines, and railroads in the borderlands they transformed rangelands into ranches and contributed to the emergence of border towns. Customs and immigration officers established ports of entry for the compliant, but also patrolled the line in search of smugglers and illegal immigrants. During the Mexican Revolution and World War I, U.S. and Mexican troops took up arms along the border, turned border towns into battlefields, and threatened to shoot anyone who dared cross the line outside of official channels. When soldiers proved inadequate to regulate all transborder movement, government officials began building fences. By the 1920s and 1930s, the laws that regulated transborder movement were bolstered by an array of physical structures and government agents that did not com-

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pletely close off the border, but did make it possible for the nation-states to use it for new agendas, including morality regulation and immigration restrictions. This landscape of fences and patrols, although it would shift and evolve over the next eighty years, is still with us in the twenty-first century.

State power, however, was never absolute. Although the nation-states became stronger and more entrenched on the border over time, they never achieved complete authority over it. What emerged on the border was a form of negotiated sovereignty in which both nation-states modified their plans in response to practical difficulties, transnational forces, local communities, and the actions of their counterparts across the line. The binational context of the border meant that it was impossible for either nation-state to exercise unilateral authority over it. Despite the legacy of the United States' conquest of northern Mexico and an imbalance of national power that consistently favored the United States, U.S. and Mexican officials repeatedly discovered that they needed to adopt binational strategies to achieve their goals of state control on the boundary line. At times the two nation-states worked together, cooperating to mark the border, suppress transborder raids, and facilitate the flow of trade and investment. At others they only grudgingly accepted that there were limits to their ability to control events across the line (limits that were greater for Mexico than the wealthier and more powerful United States) and adjusted their policies accordingly. In either case, whether in a spirit of binational cooperation or feeling backed into a corner, the United States and Mexico established state power in dialogue.

Some of these conversations took place among diplomats in Washington, DC, and Mexico City, but they more often took the form of informal arrangements crafted by local consuls, military commanders, and customs officials on the border. A critical part of the development of state power was the ability of nation-states to operate on a variety of scales—making wide-reaching policy on a national level, but utilizing the discretion of individual agents to give nuance to those policies on the local level.[10] While in the early years of the border, the discrepancy between how diplomats viewed the border and the reality on the ground reflected a weakness of state power, by the twentieth century the ability of local officials to loosely interpret laws and make exemptions had become a strength. The divergences between how goals were articulated in Mexico City and Washington, DC, and how they were carried out on the border did not always represent fissures in state power, but rather the ability of local officials to prioritize different aspects of enforcement and maintain sovereignty without constantly resorting to force.

This was particularly important in light of the many local challenges to state power that developed as U.S. and Mexican aspirations of border

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control ran up against the reality of Native peoples' dominance, transnational capitalism, and binational border communities. If the form and relative success of government strategies revealed state priorities and binational compromises, it was the ability of individuals and corporations to negotiate them that reflected the larger landscape of power that existed on the border. As they moved, invested, smuggled, shopped, and socialized across the boundary line, border people created alternative spatial orders and binational communities that challenged national definitions of space and identity. For years, Apaches successfully manipulated the border to evade the U.S. and Mexican militaries. Complaining that customs duties added an undue burden to transborder trade, smugglers created an underground economy that allowed them to profit by evading state regulations. In response to a Mexican law that restricted the land ownership of noncitizens, American capitalists crafted Mexican corporate identities that allowed them to own land on the Mexican side of the boundary line. On the border, people lived within the confines of state-imposed and nationally significant parameters, yet they produced spaces and identities that reflected national and binational agendas of their own.

The negotiation of state power left a lasting mark on the border, shaping the interactions and identities of the people who moved along and across it. On the boundary line, national identity was not just an abstract concept but a critical component of everyday life. Throughout the border's history national membership determined where a person could own property, if he could cross the border, who he could turn to for protection or representation, and, at times, even if he might live or die. The relevance of national identity changed dramatically over time in response to state policy. For instance, while in 1900 Mexican nationals could cross the border with ease, by the 1930s U.S. immigration officials were stopping Mexican laborers at the boundary line and subjecting them to physical inspections and literacy tests or simply denying them entry outright. The significance of American identity was similarly changeable. American mining engineers welcomed with open arms by Mexican officials at the turn of the century faced a surge of anti-American sentiment that threatened their lives by the time of the Mexican Revolution. Nationality was not just important for Mexicans and Americans. Native people who had long identified themselves on the basis of their ties to places and kinship groups struggled to assert their rights in a new national context in which citizenship was an important source of power and privilege. Immigrants from around the world arrived on the border where state officials and local people categorized them on the basis of their national origins. In the face of these state restrictions, people not only confronted the privileges and limitations of their nationality but also learned to game

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the system. Some of those, like some Native Americans and Chinese, and later Mexican, immigrants who lacked the ability to officially navigate this landscape of power and privilege became skillful fence hoppers, developing intricate smuggling operations and fluid binational identities that evaded national definitions of space. Nationality did not always determine if someone could cross the border but almost always influenced how they did so.[11]

The history of the border brings together the stories of hundreds of crossings with the forces that constrained them. Apaches or immigrants, capital or cattle, alcohol or bullets, every person or thing that crossed the boundary line bore witness to its changing meaning and its incomplete but increasing power. Tracing the way the border changed from the time the first people stepped foot across it to the early 1930s when drug smugglers and Mexican deportees made their way past fences and patrolmen, *Line in the Sand* reveals the hidden history of the boundary line and the many other meanings and shapes it had before it became the border that we know today.

In recounting this history I move across space and time. The book begins with the creation of the boundary line in the mid-nineteenth century and continues to the early 1930s, by which time the outlines of the modern border, with its emphasis on restricting the entry of Mexican immigrants and illegal drugs into the United States, were apparent. By focusing on this period, I contribute to a growing body of scholarship spanning the divide between histories of the Spanish colonial borderlands and the social science and humanities literature on the late twentieth-century U.S.-Mexico border.[12] *Line in the Sand* demonstrates not only that the border lay at the center of a borderlands region in which private individuals and government agents continued to contest the limits of state authority and national identity long after the establishment of fixed national boundaries, but also argues that the border itself is a critical site for understanding the evolution of government priorities and the negotiation of state power in Mexico and the United States more broadly.

The geographic focus of the narrative also shifts subtly over the course of the book. While this is a history of the entire western U.S.-Mexico boundary line stretching from west of the Rio Grande to the Pacific Ocean, different parts of the border rise to the foreground at different points in time in order to highlight central themes and developments. In pursuit of an understanding of how Native people used the boundary line to evade military defeat, we will follow Chiricahua Apaches as they moved between reservations in Arizona Territory and the Mexican Sierra Madre. The construction of railroads will take the story first to Nogales on the Arizona-Sonora border in the 1880s and then a few decades later

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to the California–Baja California boundary line. While Nogales and the nearby Arizona-Sonora border towns of Naco, Douglas, and Agua Prieta are the best places to look for evidence of how ranching and mining transformed the border, Tijuana achieves prominence with the rise of border vice. This narrative geography reflects both the diversity of experience along the boundary line and how the border changed over time.

The book is organized both chronologically and thematically. Focusing on the delimitation and demarcation of the boundary line, chapter one details the diplomacy and warfare that led to the determination of the location of the boundary line and the trying process through which the Joint United States and Mexican Boundary Commission attempted to survey and mark the boundary on the ground. The story then shifts to the United States' and Mexico's efforts to back up their territorial claims by asserting military authority over the boundary line. Focusing on the violent histories of Mexico's defenses against filibustering and both nation-states' wars against Native peoples, chapter two explores both the alternate versions of spatial organization and power that persisted and evolved in the borderlands and how the nation-states managed to suppress them in the first four decades of the border's existence.

With the establishment of military sovereignty in the 1880s, the border entered a new phase of capitalist transformation. Chapter three describes how ranchers, miners, investors, laborers, railroad executives, and innumerable economic actors integrated the border into an emerging transnational economy and began to create binational communities on the boundary line. Looking at the economic and social spaces produced in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this chapter explores how the border became the centerpiece of a landscape of binational interaction and exchange. In chapter four I delve into the government efforts to regulate, tax, and restrict transborder movement and enforce jurisdictional boundaries within this context of social and economic integration. Concentrating on early customs, immigration, and law enforcement, this chapter shows how state agents adapted their agendas to local conditions and embraced binational cooperation.

Beginning with the eruption of the Mexican Revolution in 1910, the negotiations and compromises that had allowed the transborder economy and binational communities to flourish became increasingly untenable. Chapter five turns to the decade of war that included both the Mexican Revolution and the United States' participation in the First World War, describing how war transformed the border from a site of interaction and cooperation to one of conflict and division—a transformation that was reflected spatially in transborder battles and the erection of border fences. This burgeoning border control apparatus took on new meaning in the 1920s as the United States and Mexico adopted contrasting

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approaches to the regulation of public morality. Chapter six describes how U.S. prohibitions prompted the growth of border vice districts and alcohol and drug smuggling along the boundary line and explores the conflict that arose on both sides of the border over how the nation-states could or should use border controls to stymie these developments. Chapter seven connects the history of the boundary line to the contemporary focus on controlling immigration. Building up to the Great Depression and the mass deportations of people of Mexican and Chinese descent from the United States and Mexico, respectively, this chapter traces the emergence of an immigration-control apparatus on the boundary line and how political and economic conditions influenced how and against whom the nation-states used it. As U.S. immigration laws increasingly defined Mexicans as outsiders who could not freely cross the boundary line, the divisive power of the border became more apparent. This sense of division between the United States and Mexico and the United States' ongoing attempts to assert its authority over when and how Mexican immigrants cross the border, which reached one peak in the deportations of the Great Depression, continue to define the border today.

This is the story of how two nation-states, their citizens, and a host of historical forces transformed an undistinguished strip of land into a site of capitalist production and a meaningful marker of state power and national identities. It traces the borderlands' metamorphosis as the U.S. and Mexican governments restricted Native people to reservations and new arrivals moved into the region and asserted their own claims to the boundary line. It reveals how dramatically the U.S. and Mexican states changed over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, growing from adolescent republics with tenuous control of their territory to sophisticated bureaucracies that regulated, if imperfectly, the movement of people, animals, commodities, and capital across their shared border. This is the history of how a line in the sand became a conditional barrier between two nations and their people.