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On the Line: Living the US -Mexico Border

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Welcome to On the Line: Living the U.S.-Mexico Border.



Photo by Chris Galanis, MFA Candidate

This exhibit encourages a closer examination of the United States-Mexico Border giving particular attention to the individuals and communities that exist along the horizontal boundary. Very often, discussions of the Border focus on the international political relationship between Washington and Mexico City as opposed to the local interactions that occur on a daily basis along the territorial divide. These images demonstrate the lived experiences of communities and lives on the line.

The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, signed in 1848, ended the Mexican-American War and stretched the U.S. territory line to its present location. Prior to this political demarcation, mining brought large settlement into the region and along with it came with new ideologies, lifestyles, and industries. People have long moved across this politically inscribed line for economic, familial, or social reasons. Their movement fuels a local need to cooperate even as national goals are intended to separate them.

During the Mexican Revolution, the need to defend the U.S. side of the border region became a primary concern as Francisco “Pancho” Villa led a large raid through the town of Columbus, New Mexico in 1916. While the raid was intended to serve as a means to replenish ammunition and supplies to the *Villistas*, murder

and retaliation resulted in various lives lost. General John Pershing created a military base in Columbus and led the punitive expedition into Mexico in order to capture Villa.

Global events, such as World War I and II, while impacting various nations, had a specific local impact at the U.S.-Mexico Border where the fear of communism and opposition to imperialism met. In order to maintain levels of production during wartime, the U.S. government implemented the *Bracero* program in 1942, intended to utilize Mexican laborers on a temporary basis until soldiers returned to their jobs. U.S. reliance on a labor class outside of its citizenry has resulted in large immigrant populations moving through the border on a consistent basis.

In 1994, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), lifted tariffs on trade and agricultural production between Canada, the United States, and Mexico. NAFTA opened the Mexican side of border communities to the establishment of Canadian and U.S.-owned maquiladoras (factories) that produce items ranging from computers, sunglasses, garage door openers, to cardboard boxes. NAFTA, similar to the *Bracero* Program, allowed the U.S. to continue with a temporary labor trade program, providing limited legal use of an undocumented labor population.

The implementation of NAFTA and construction of maquiladoras presented new employment opportunities causing an increase in population movement from Southern Mexico to its Northern borders. Women who began to enter the workforce in large numbers, specifically in Juarez, Chihuahua, fell victim to brutal violence from an unknown source. Families of the victims, whose bodies were often found burnt in shallow graves, have generated international interest by begging for the Mexican government to investigate the more than 400 murders of the young women of Juarez.

The pieces included in this exhibit come from the original photography work of UNM student and MFA candidate, Chris Galanis and pictorial collections housed in the Center for Southwest Research & Special Collections (CSWR) including: The Pancho Villa 1916 Punitive Expedition; Pershing's Punitive Expedition 1916; Mexican Mining Album; Photographs of Mexico and Mexican People by Contemporary Photographers 1964-2001; ASARO (Asamblea de Artistas Revolucionarios de Oaxaca); and Taller de Gráfica Popular. Many of the collections are available through New Mexico Digital Collections and searchable on the internet by collection title.