

Life and Experiences in the U.S./Mexico Borderlands

The Beginning

Studies indicate that Homo Sapiens appears to have occupied all of Africa about 150,000 years ago; some moved out of Africa as early as 125,000 years ago into Asia, marking the beginning of migratory patterns in humans. Migration to the Americas took place 20,000 to 15,000 years ago. Early humans migrated due to many factors, such as changing climate, landscape, and inadequate food-supply for survival.

AD 400–1450

The Original People (Kiowa, Gipuy, Comanche, Rarámuri and Tigua) of the border region in what is known today as El Paso, Ciudad Juárez, and Chihuahua, Mexico, hunt, gather, forage, and farm maize on their native and border free lands along the most biologically diverse desert in the world, the Chihuahuan Desert.

May 1, 1598

Juan de Oñate takes “formal” possession of the area for Spain. He crosses the Rio Grande/Bravo near a site west of present downtown El Paso, which he called El Paso del Norte, meaning the crossing of the northern river. Oñate also claims to have held the first original Thanksgiving day.

July 4, 1776

British settlers ignore orders coming from their motherland to stop expanding west in what could result in a war with either French occupied territories or war with the Original People, there and further west into the unknown. This, and tax fatigue, lead the first English settlers to gain their independence and keep colonizing westward.

September 16, 1821

Spain accepts the Independence of The First Mexican Empire, leaving Mexico with its largest territorial organization it would ever come to know.

August 18, 1824

The General Colonization Law is a Mexican statute that allows foreigners, primarily American settlers and displaced Spaniards who remain on the land after Mexico’s independence, to immigrate to their new sparsely populated lands in hopes of economic growth, increasing the number of males available to defend the country, and bringing new capital and skills into the country to replace those lost when many Spaniards were expelled or chose to leave the country.

April 24, 1836

As the newly formed United States of America begins to metastasize westward, it begins to bump heads with the other newly independent country of Mexico, particularly over the land of Tejas which is being uninhabited by either colonizer while its Original People live and thrive on it freely. Newly independent Mexico desperately tries to incentivize populating its new northern land, in a move of desperation invites Americans to migrate to these new lands hoping they would follow their laws of freeing their slaves, converting to Catholicism, and speak Spanish in order to naturalize. This resulted in the warmly welcomed American immigrants forming the Republic of Texas in a land grab.

1837

Texas publishes a map claiming the Rio Grande as its border with Mexico and not the Nueces River, the border since the Spanish colonial era. The Mexican Congress rejected the Treaties of Velasco signed by Antonio López de Santa Anna, arguing that Santa Anna had no authority to grant independence to Texas leaving a huge chunk of land, Mesilla Valley, “in dispute” for ten years.

April 25, 1846

United States of America’s President Polk baits and provokes Mexico to attack American troops in order to use the attack to annex the disputed land from Mexico a year after Mexico declines his initial offer of \$25 million (\$657,143,939 present day with adjusted inflation) to purchase California and New Mexico. Polk uses the attack to get congressional approval to begin the Mexican-American War.

1846-1848

The Mexican-American War marked the first U.S. armed conflict chiefly fought in Mexico. It pitted a politically divided and militarily unprepared Mexico against the expansionist-minded administration of U.S. President James K. Polk, who believed the United States had a “manifest destiny” to spread across the continent going west to the Pacific Ocean. When the dust cleared, Mexico had lost about one-third of its territory, including nearly all of present-day California, Utah, Nevada, Arizona, and New Mexico.

September 13, 1847

The Niños Héroes (in English: Boy Heroes), also known as the Heroic Cadets or Boy Soldiers, were six Mexican teenage military cadets. These cadets died defending Mexico at Mexico City’s Chapultepec Castle (then, serving as the Mexican Army’s military academy) from invading U.S. forces in the Battle of Chapultepec, during the Mexican-American War. The Niños Héroes are commemorated by a national holiday on September 13.

February 2, 1848

The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo is signed, bringing an end to the Mexican-American War, as well as providing basic civil rights to the displaced Mexicans and Original People on the land who had been living there since before any land disputes ever began. All people living there have no voting rights and get segregated and racially targeted into losing most of what was promised to them with this treaty.

December 30, 1853

Gadsden Purchase is one of the United States of America’s cheapest real estate deals where James Gadsden, the United States minister under President Franklin Pierce, purchased thirty thousand square miles from California to El Paso for \$10 million (\$337,959,740 present day with adjusted inflation) from Antonio López de Santana. This would be the final adjustment to the present day border we know and still maintain today.

May 6, 1882

Congress passes the Chinese Exclusion Act as its first immigration restriction law. This was the result of high unemployment rates across the country creating tensions between Chinese railroad workers and unemployed American citizens. Eventually in 1867 Central Pacific Railroad begins to pay starvation wages to the Chinese railroad workers, resulting in over 5,000 workers to strike causing the Central Pacific Railroad to cut off their food supply to starve them and force them back to work a week later. After this, labor unions and worker’s parties begin a “throw the Chinese out” rhetoric that spreads to congress resulting in this law.

1904

The first border patrol is established after rogue bounty hunters and Texas rangers amongst other police units act as vigilantes on the border to enforce the Chinese Exclusion Act and prevent the Chinese immigrants from entering the United States of America.

1909-1911

The first barrier built by the U.S. is erected in California, followed by the first barrier built by Mexico in 1918.

1920

The first Bracero program is put into place as an agreement to receive Mexican migrant labor, primarily in agriculture, to fill the voids left by American citizens drafted into the climactic period of World War I. Later in 1942, the “official” Bracero program was enacted during World War II. The program called for braceros to be guaranteed wages, housing, food, and exemption from military service. Though this was the agreement promised by the United States, workers were denied for multiple reasons.

1993

President Bill Clinton begins a border wall expansion in El Paso and San Diego, California.

September 11, 2001

Attack on American soil increases border tensions and security, changing the flow between both cities/countries forever as Congress shifts focus and resources to tighten border security. Immigrants remain resilient and still find other ways in.

January 25, 2017

After running a controversial campaign touting wild accusations against Mexican immigrants, Donald Trump signs Executive Order 13767: Border Security and Immigration Enforcement Improvements into law, just five days after being inaugurated as President of the U.S. The order effectively lays down the infrastructure to build the “wall” he described during his campaign.

2018

Caravans from South America arrive at the borders in El Paso and Ciudad Juarez as well as San Diego and Tijuana with a little over 5,000 immigrants mainly fleeing the consequences of the military coup 2009 Honduran Constitutional Crisis. Organized by the most conservative business leaders in the country, they felt their interests were being jeopardized by new progressive leftist leadership attempting to balance one of Latin America’s most unequal distribution of wealth. Honduras president at the time Manuel Zelaya pushed for a Referendum, insisting that Honduras’ grinding poverty stemmed from a constitution written in 1982 at the height of that country’s brutal repression of leftists- that rigs the game for the most powerful families and interests.

2021

The U.S./Mexico border remains a point of contention in American politics despite governing party changes.