

One Hundred Years
of Solitude, Struggle,
and Violence along
the US/Mexico Border

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An Oral History

By

John Thomas

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



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This book first published 2017

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-5275-0301-1

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-0301-4

To everyone who, in the course of history, has ever set foot upon that scrap of earth now known as the Lazy Y Five Ranch in Cochise County, Arizona.

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FOREWORD

The issue of immigration is one of the hot button topics globally, but especially in the United States, and especially in its southwest! The author of this book, John Thomas, has written a remarkable volume. He spent much of his youth living in Cochise County Arizona, right next to the border between the United States and Mexico. Cochise is the name of a famous Apache chief and warrior and the name resonates with United States citizens (Estadounidenses). I remember the name from an old TV show that aired in the 1960's, I think.

My comments on this seminal book are based on my days as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Central America and working quite closely with Rigoberta Menchu, the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate from Guatemala.

As a Peace Corps volunteer, I worked in a small town called Los Chiles, Costa Rica, about two kilometers from the border with Nicaragua, as a community vegetable garden promotor. Doña Rigoberta, who supervised the gardeners, opened up her connections to me with community leaders in Guatemala to do the same sort of work there, and to build school classrooms. Both situations allowed me to meet many people who lived on the edge of existence, as they did not have enough food nor anything that could be called a house. It was obvious to me that one of the main alternatives for economic success for these families to survive was to head north to the United States and send back remittances to their families. John Thomas's book resonates with me because he delves deeply into the psyche of those individuals on both sides of the immigration issue, but especially the motivations of those desperate people yearning to breathe free in the United States.

John Thomas shows us on a deeply personal and passionate, yet intellectual level that things regarding immigration are complicated, but resolvable so long as one recognizes that there is no such thing as an illegal human being in the eyes of God. Anyone reading this book, no matter what their political views are, should be able to recognize that were they in the economic situation of most poverty-stricken people in Central America and Mexico, they would also take the aptly named Devil's Highway to the north.

This book is deserving of your time and reflection, especially as we seem on the verge of wasting a lot of money on a wall along our southern

border, when a small percentage of the money for the wall could be targeted at the reasons for which poor human beings flee their home environment. It will help you understand the issues we face regarding immigration and accept the richness of cultural difference.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This story begins and ends at a section of land in Cochise County, Arizona, known as the Lazy Y 5 Ranch. My story, too, began on that ranch and, I suspect, will end there, when I take my place alongside my grandmother and mother in the family cemetery. I am grateful for having spent my formative years at the multicultural, multiethnic, multinational borderlands crossroads. Living where 15,000 years of history are visible—from Clovis tips, to Apache burial mounds, to the footprints of coyotes, bobcats, and mountain lions—stirs the imagination and enriches the soul. Living that close to the ground inspired me to reach for the sky.

I am grateful to all who were willing to share their stories with me. Your honesty, courage, and grace provided immeasurable depth and perspective to this tale. Thank you Antonio, Susie, Louise, Humberto, Javier, Victor, Enrique, Manolo, Lupita, Abram, Rigoberto, Raphael, Charles, Mike, Jack, Victoria, Janet, Ana Teresa, and everyone who offered me shelter, literal and figurative, during my pilgrimage to finding myself, my family, my country, and my world.

I thank my wife Dorothy for gamely supporting my journey that took me south of the border, off the grid, and beyond the reach of the usually omnipresent magical rays that somehow power cellular phones. Dorothy also suggested the book's title!

I thank my sister Sally for joining me on part of my journey and for transcribing some of my English interviews. I thank my friend Lancia Blatchley for assistance in translating my own Spanish interviews. It turns out that knowing a language well enough to ask a few questions isn't a guarantee that you'll be able to comprehend the nuance in the answers!

I thank my student Leah Mantei for proof reading, a knack for the em dash and Oxford comma, good cheer, and a critical eye. She's not only wise beyond her years; she's wise beyond my years.

The Albert Schweitzer Institute awarded me a fellowship in support of my borderlands journey. I hope that this book reflects at least some measure of Dr. Schweitzer's "reverence for life." I offer a special thanks to David Ives, the Institute's Executive Director and a 2016 Nobel Peace Prize nominee, for his thoughtful and articulate foreword to this book.

I wish that I could express my gratitude to my grandmother, Grace McCool. Thoughts of her accompanied me on every step of my journey,

and her life informs every page of this work. She most certainly would have had advice to offer me, and I would have enjoyed losing to her in at least one more round of verbal jousting.

Mostly, I am grateful for the good behavior of any unseen beings whom I may have irritated along the path that led to this book. My grandmother often warned me against disturbing the spirits of the dead. Unfortunately, I never thought to ask her what to do to appease an angered inhabitant of the world beyond.

PREFACE

Estadounidense



Fig P-1: Lazy Y 5 Ranch, Cochise County Arizona, 2017.

Translated from the Spanish, literally, this word conjures the nonsensical, “Unitedstatesian.” Nonsensical because the expression does not exist in the English language. Scour the dictionaries of your choice—Oxford English, Webster’s, even the Urban Dictionary. You’ll find no such word.

Type “Estadounidense” into Google Translate and that most Unitedstatesian of decipherers spits out, “American.” Substitute the particularized Spanish designation of a citizen of any other country of the Americas—North, South, or Central—and Google spawns an equally particularized English label. “Peruano” yields “Peruvian.” “Ecuatoriano” yields Ecuadorean. “Mexicano,” “Mexican.” “Chilean,” “Chileno.” “El Salvadorian,” “El Salvadoreño.” “Colombiano,” “Colombiano.” “Canadian,” “Canadiense.” Given “Estadounidense,” though, Google produces the word that lays claim to all three of the Americas. Given “America,” the Urban Dictionary

generates a cheeky, if inaccurate, explanation: “A country that claims the name of an entire continent to itself alone for no compelling reason.”¹ The name actually claims two continents, and three for those who view Central America as the globe’s eighth continent.

Others, of course, have commented on this linguistic curiosity. In his 2002 essay, *From Columbia to the United States of America: the Creation and Spreading of a Name*,² Pascale Smorag chronicles the process that would culminate in a country embracing a multi continent appellation. The story begins on July 4, 1776 with Thomas Jefferson and his colleagues declaring the independence of “the United States of America,” a name derived from one of its supposed discoverers, Amerigo Vespucci. Not all members of the public appreciated Jefferson’s choice of title of their new nation. Some objected to its multi-word form. Others thought “Columbus” or “Columbia” a proper way to honor its true founder. Still others believed “Fredonia” or “Freedonia” suitable to announce new won freedom. Washington Irving argued for the geographic specific “United States of Appalachia” or “Alleghania.” “United States of America” carried the day, most likely because it “sounded more rational and was eventually preferred to poetic and grandiloquent designations.”³ That multi-word title was almost immediately shortened to a single word, much to the consternation of Mr. Irving:

In France, when I have announced myself as an American, I have been supposed to belong to one of the French colonies; in Spain, to be from Mexico or Peru, or some other Spanish-American country.⁴

Irving was not alone. As Henry Louis Mencken recognized in his 1947 essay, *Names for Americans*, “The right of Americans to be so called is frequently challenged, especially in Latin-America.”⁵

That challenge, of course, has failed. The over-inclusive nature of the name is the very reason for its appeal. To its defenders, the multi-word alternative is but a “spiritless, generic fabrication, useful for conciseness in news reports but otherwise meaningless.”⁶ Objectors to the linguistic land grab should simply “deal with it.”⁷

It is ironic that at the same time that US residents cling to a name that incorporates the three Americas, they are fighting to make sure that inhabitants of the other two Americas stay out of “our America.” Sentiment about immigration is more polarized than ever in the US, splitting along political and generational lines, with older, conservative members of the public more likely to oppose immigration.⁸ Moreover, in many, racism fuels anti-immigration sentiment.⁹ It’s ironic, too, that a country built upon an invitation to “your tired, your poor, your huddled

masses yearning to breathe free” claims that it is through playing host to such people.

The US is not thrashing about alone in the deep end of the irony pool. Immediately upon Britain’s stunning “Brexit” vote to succeed from the European Union, Twitter was abuzz with the meme, “Colonizes half the world, complains about immigrants.”¹⁰

Concern over immigration is grounded, in part, in anxiety about economic, cultural, and other changes catalyzed by the increase in population and demographic transformation that accompany migration. But, in the US, as in UK, a central force behind anti-immigration fervor is White fear about losing majority status. As political scientist Samuel Huntington predicted in his 2005 book, *Who Are We? The Challenges to America’s National Identity*, incursion on racial and cultural dominance has bred fear, anger, and backlash:

The various forces challenging the core American culture and creed could generate a move by native white Americans to revive the discarded and discredited racial and ethnic concepts of American identity and to create an America that would exclude, expel, or suppress people of other racial, ethnic, and cultural groups. Historical and contemporary experience suggest that this is a highly probable reaction from a once dominant ethnic-racial group that feels threatened by the rise of other groups. It could produce a racially intolerant country with high levels of intergroup conflict.¹¹

In the 2016 Presidential sweepstakes, Donald Trump gave voice to those otherwise unwilling, or having no platform, unable to articulate the sentiments that Huntington forecast would rise to national conversation. Within his first one hundred days in office,¹² Trump promised to marshal forces to seal our borders, complete the design of the “big, beautiful wall”¹³ that will bar the Mexican government from “sending people that have lots of problems and they’re bringing those problems. They’re bringing drugs, they’re bringing crime. They’re rapists and some, I assume, are good people, but I speak to border guards and they’re telling us what we’re getting.”¹⁴

Trump initially promised to round all twelve million, or so, of the undocumented and to strip birthright citizenship from children born to the undocumented.¹⁵ In his first post-election interview, however, President Trump reduced his immediate goal by eight or nine million:

What we are going to do is get the people that are criminal and have criminal records, gang members, drug dealers, where a lot of these people, probably 2 million, it could be even 3 million, we are getting them out of

our country or we are going to incarcerate. But we're getting them out of our country. They're here illegally.¹⁶

And, that big, beautiful wall? It will not be big, nor beautiful, nor, even, a wall. In that same interview, President Trump committed, instead, to (more) fencing.¹⁷

Oh, and he promised to institute “a total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States,” including US citizens returning from abroad. (Or, maybe not.¹⁸) He also characterized Native Americans as lazy,¹⁹ mocked the speech of Asians,²⁰ and hailed “my African American” upon seeing a dark face in the very white crowd at one of his campaign events.²¹

Why would someone hoping to win a national election hurl insults at racial and ethnic groups comprising nearly forty percent of the nation's electorate?²² How can one harboring such a dim view of so many United Statesians hope to make good on a promise to “Make American great again?”²³ Because, Trump does not consider members of groups he denigrates to be Americans.

Donald Trump appeals to his audience by the near-constant use of the rhetorical, “We.” “We are going to put America First, and we are going to make America great again.” “[W]e can come back bigger and better and stronger than ever before.” We “Americans are the people that tamed the West, that dug out the Panama Canal, that sent satellites across the solar system, that built the great dams, and so much more.”²⁴

But, when Trump refers to members of those groups he often maligns, he slips into the third person:

We're going to have great relationships with the Hispanics. The Hispanics have been so incredible to me. They want jobs. Everybody wants jobs. The African Americans want jobs. If you look at what's going on, they want jobs.²⁵

There apparently is no cure for ethnic or race-based, non-American status. Trump accused US District Court Judge Gonzalo Curiel, the jurist presiding over the case in which the plaintiffs allege that Trump University and its namesake defrauded them, of bias because “he is a Mexican.” When informed that Judge Curiel had been born in Indiana, Trump remained resolute that the judge's “Mexican heritage” rendered him incapable of rendering a fair decision in a case in which the defendant plans to build a wall between the US and Mexico.²⁶ Yet Trump considers himself, the son of an immigrant mother, the two of his three wives who emigrated from European countries, and his own children born to those

immigrants²⁷ to be among the “we.” Geography, no matter how many generations removed, remains destiny.

Distinguishing as “they” those not of white European ancestry, unsurprisingly, made Trump popular among white United Statesians, especially among males without college educations.²⁸ Indeed, some of those supporters could be heard chanting “Go back to Africa”²⁹ when the occasional Trump’s African American wandered upon the scene. A white majority, sensing its majoritarian status at risk, embraced Mr. Trump’s notion of “we” and a few of them struck out at the “they.”

Trump’s “we” won the election, and on his post-election victory lap, the President elect thanked “they” who did not vote. A month after the election, at a rally Pennsylvania, where he was the first Republican to win the Presidential vote in over thirty years, he remarked on the downturn in minority vote. African American voters, who comprised thirteen percent of the state’s voters in the 2012 election, represented only ten percent of the electorate in 2016. “They didn’t come out to vote for Hillary, they didn’t come out,”³⁰ he exhorted. “And that was the big thing, so thank you to the African-American community.”³¹

The “we” most certainly voted. Trump garnered sixty-three percent of the white male vote and fifty-three of the white female vote.³² Voters split as definitively by educational background as they did by race. Hillary Clinton carried voters with college degrees by fifty-two percent to forty-three percent, while Trump carried those without a college degree by fifty-two percent to forty-four, thus representing the widest voter education voting gap since Ronald Reagan’s 1980 election.³³ The disparity increases when both education and race are considered. Trump won the votes of two-thirds of whites without college educations and carried whites with college educations by forty-nine percent to forty-five percent.³⁴

Although other factors played a role—in particular, “working-class fears about globalization, immigration and the cultural arrogance of the ‘progressive’ cultural elite”³⁵—ultimately, Trump rode to victory on “an enormous wave of support among white working-class voters.”³⁶ That support was “largely about Caucasian fears of the browning of America.”³⁷

That fear of losing majoritarian status is justified. The week after Trump announced his candidacy for President of the US, the country’s census bureau announced that non-Hispanic whites had become a demographic minority among children under five years of age.³⁸ The Census Bureau has also predicted that by 2020 non-Hispanic whites will be a minority among those under the age of eighteen and that by 2043 non-Hispanic whites will be a minority among the population as a whole.³⁹

White reign in the Americas will have been fleeting. Humans arrived in the Americas in the form of the Clovis People some 15,000 years ago.⁴⁰ These first hominids likely originated on the African continent and trekked to the New World over the Behring Strait or somehow floated across the Atlantic.⁴¹ However they journeyed to the Americas, the Clovis preceded Columbus and other Europeans by some 14,500 years.

Estimates of the human population of the pre-Columbian Americas vary dramatically from a few million to over one hundred million,⁴² with ten or twelve million likely living north of what is now Mexico.⁴³ What is clear is that Columbus and his fifty, or so,⁴⁴ fellow non-Hispanic whites represented a distinct minority when they stepped from the Niña, Pinta, and Santa Maria.⁴⁵ The ratio between whites and others changed rapidly, of course, as more Europeans teemed into the continent and disease and violence diminished the native population.

It is difficult to pinpoint the moment in history when immigrating non-Hispanic whites first outnumbered the native population. Article I of the US Constitution mandates a decennial census, but excludes from the count “Indians not taxed”⁴⁶—those “living on reservations or those roaming in unsettled areas of the country.”⁴⁷ Thus, the census takers made no effort to tally natives until 1890 and full effort wasn’t made until the 1930 census,⁴⁸ the first to occur after Native Americans became United Statesians courtesy of the 1924 enactment of the Indian Citizenship Act.⁴⁹ By then, and subject to almost certain undercounting of Native Americans due to census taker limitations and bias,⁵⁰ “Indians” numbered 332,397 and represented three tenths of one percent of the population.⁵¹ Whites numbered 108,864,207, accounting for 88.7 percent of the population.⁵²

The tipping point? Probably somewhere in the neighborhood of one hundred years before that 1930 census. Growing demand for land by the growing number of European immigrants motivated the US military in the early 1800s, under the direction of Major General Andrew Jackson, to remove the Creek, Cherokee, Chickasaw, and other tribes from what is now the Southeastern US.⁵³ When Jackson became President, he was able, via the enactment of 1830’s Indian Removal Act,⁵⁴ to provide legal support for his Indian-free policy. Perhaps not coincidentally, that year the White population had reached ten million,⁵⁵ or about the same as the number of Native Americans present in what would become the United States when Columbus and his crew reached the New World. After a respite called the Civil War, the US eagerly re-engaged in Indian Removal. Assisted by a malaria epidemic that between 1830 and 1841 eliminated up to ninety percent of the Native population in the northeast⁵⁶ and the completion of the transcontinental railroad and attendant devastation

of the West's herds of buffalo,⁵⁷ non-Hispanic whites soon achieved dominion over the continent's native residents.

Assuming that the US Census Bureau proves correct in its prediction, non-Hispanics whites will have held their majority status for about 200 years before relinquishing it in 2043. Those two centuries represent just over one percent of humans' presence in the Americas – just enough time for Clío, the Greek goddess of history, to blink an eye.



Fig. P-2: Circa 1956 on the Lazy Y 5 Ranch. Left to right: my sister, Sally, my mother, Sarah, me, my Aunt Guenn, my mother's younger sister.

In some places, White dominion will last but half a blink. I grew up in the 1950s and 1960s on a ranch in southern Arizona located but a few miles from the Mexican border. There, legendary Apache leader Geronimo did not surrender to the European settlers until 1886⁵⁸ and armed skirmishes between colonizers and Apaches continued until 1924,⁵⁹ just a couple of years before my family settled in that parched, high desert. In a place where those still living may have witnessed immigrant and native conflict, one might expect the land's current occupants to view their dominion as fortuitously achieved and transitory. But, ranchers like Nevada militant Cliven Bundy claim that their "ancestral rights," if but a century or so old, are immune not only to the claims of those displaced decades earlier, but even to the federal government's claims to any lands on which their European immigrant predecessors ever walked.⁶⁰ My own family, still on our "ancestral lands," have expressed the same sentiments.

During my childhood, there was no border such as we would recognize today. We crossed from Douglas, Arizona, to Agua Prieta, Sonora with little thought and certainly no paperwork. Everyone spoke both languages;

we were distinguishable primarily by our preferred idiom and, perhaps, skin pigment. My family bought building supplies, durable foods, liquor, and, often, medicines in Mexico, where prices were cheaper and good restaurants plentiful.

Life in the borderlands has changed. My relatives and other US ranchers speak with anger and fear about their neighbors to the south. My friends on the Mexican ranches rue the carnage, literal and figurative, that a drug trade fueled by northerners' demand for chemical enjoyment has wrought upon their lives.

This incongruity between recent past and present moved me to embark on this project. We've got immigrants complaining about immigration, recent displacers anxious about displacement and lambasting the morality of those who might trod upon their land, a people whose preferred appellation lays claim to the three Americas who focus their anger on the potential incursion by the inhabitants of the other two Americas.

I realized that I no longer recognized the people of the lands where I spent my formative years. "If you don't know where you are . . . , you don't know who you are," says Wallace Stegner, paraphrasing Wendell Berry.⁶¹ "Like Thoreau, Burroughs, Frost, Faulkner, Steinbeck—lovers of known earth, known weathers, and known neighbors both human and nonhuman," Berry is a "'placed' person."⁶² I found myself displaced. I didn't know where I was, or more correctly, where I came from. How could I know who I was? How could I know who my people were?

So, I set a course for self, family, and, hopefully, a nation's discovery. I believed that the journey would necessarily be both bi-national and bilingual. I also believed that I'd understand the mission and the result only if I traveled alone. I began reaching out to people on both sides of the border and working at regaining my long-lost Spanish language skills.

Regarding the first effort, I sought out people who had lived the border's vicissitudes: older members of families that had long lived in the borderlands. These folks, I hoped, might be able to recall what their grandparents had told them, providing a century's worth of oral history.

I began my language acquisition journey by matriculating in a year of university-level, intermediate Spanish. I then moved up to a year of one-on-one tutorials via Skype with a Peruvian Spanish language specialist before heading to South America to spend a month with her, my Maestra en Español.

Prepared as best I could, I moved to the borderlands for the fall of 2015, alternatively living on ranches and in small communities in the Mexican State of Sonora and the corresponding territory in the US that

stretches from Tijuana on the California border to Agua Prieta on the Arizona border.

I lived, dined, and talked with Mexicans and United Statesians, Sonorans and Arizonans. Americans.

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CHAPTER ONE

THE DEVIL'S HIGHWAY



Fig 1-1: San Pedro River, 2017.

Ahead of us the twin blacktop lanes of Route 80 slash across the high desert of the San Pedro River Basin before winding up the west side of the craggy Mule Mountains. This is ranching land in Cochise County, the scrap of Arizona that abuts Mexico on the south and New Mexico on the east. Named for the famed Apache leader, this is home to Tombstone, the Boot Hill Cemetery, the Gunfight at the O.K. Corral, and, well, the entire Wild West legend. In a process initiated in 1853 with Ambassador James Gadsden's signature on what would come to be called the Gadsden Purchase, the surrounding territory became part of the United States when President Franklin Pierce signed the treaty the following year.¹ The territory's honeymoon with the United States wasn't peaceful. Settler and Apache conflict always smoldered and often blazed, boomtowns like Tombstone attracted risk takers and lawbreakers, and cattle rustling was the reigning leisure pursuit.

Cochise County was the epicenter of this tempestuous time period and our road traverses a land peppered with Native American burial grounds, the corpses of those who discovered that they were not the fastest gun in the west, and the sad remnants of failed homesteads. But, we also pass success stories of American expansion—lovely ranch houses surrounded by huge cottonwood trees, cattle grazing peacefully, and cowboys out on the range doing what cowboys have always done—before reaching 6,000 feet of elevation at Mule Pass and rolling down the other side into Tombstone Canyon and the mile-high mining town of Bisbee.

Navigating the narrow, twisting road can be treacherous in bad weather and I recall a close encounter with a precipice here some three decades ago. Then, still a practicing lawyer, I was running late for a trial in the Bisbee courthouse. After hurtling up the mountain and flying over the summit, I took a turn too quickly, spun my car on the snow-covered road, and got a rather scary 360-degree viewing of the canyon. But, navigated at appropriate speed on a beautiful summer day like today, it's a passage worth traversing.

The pass is breathtaking to those of us weaned in these arid lands. As you ascend the mountains, grasslands give way to scrub oak and tall, spindly ocotillo cactus. The peak is dominated by rocky outcroppings and views that, in good weather, extend a hundred miles into Mexico. Here you experience the Big Sky Phenomenon: your view extends to the horizon and between you and the end of the earth lie substantial, jagged, leering features. These are the “Wide Open Spaces” about which the Dixie Chicks sang: “Room to make ... big mistakes” and places where there are “high stakes.”² But, if you spent your early years snuggled among the trees in the Northeast, where I now live, you'll likely feel the sway of agoraphobia, and acrophobia if you glance over the edge as you navigate yet another hairpin turn.

Your view may not be drawn to the horizon, though, because Bisbee beacons. The former Phelps Dodge Mining Company town was once home to laborers who toiled to persuade the surrounding mountains to surrender pots of gold, silver, lead, and, most importantly, copper. Aptly named streets like Tombstone Canyon Road, Moon Canyon, Star Avenue, and Brewery Gulch are lined with turn-of-the-Twentieth-Century architecture and spread out like a web in the canyons that lie between the peaks of the hilly terrain. The town's economic cornerstone, the Copper Queen Mine, originated with prospector George Warren's 1877 claim and, with its sibling, the Lavender Pit Mine, yielded a billion tons of copper before falling ore prices forced Phelps Dodge to close both in 1975.³ Aging hippie artisans have now displaced the miners and tourism has

superseded the earth's treasures as the foundation of the area's economy. Cathouses have become art galleries. Mining company administrative buildings have morphed into artisan cooperatives. And, bars have, well, added ferns.

If you can resist the lure of Bisbee, you'll snake past the huge, open pit mine, pass through the neighboring village of Warren, named for that prospector, and land upon a straight stretch of road that, after fifteen minutes, or so, puts you at the US/Mexico border. The sister towns of Douglas on the US side and Agua Prieta ("Dirty Water," really) on the Mexico side share a heritage, if not a future, or a present. Douglas formed in the early 1900s around Phelps Dodge's smelter that used giant blast furnaces to separate the copper from less valuable substances in the ore that originate in those mines up the road in Bisbee. The unwanted byproduct—slag—is piled in heaps that still dominate the surrounding landscape.

Agua Prieta, once the port for bringing ore from Mexican mining operations to the Douglas smelter, lies on the other side of the border fence. But, the fence is a relatively new addition to the topography. In my childhood days in the 1950s, there was no physical demarcation of the border. Indeed, the dirt runway for the tiny Douglas airport spanned the border, as did those slag heaps.

In the latter half of the Twentieth Century, a modest three-strand barbed wire fence came to demark the boundaries between the countries. Locals still speak of the "alambristo" ("wireist") who enters the US illegally "de alambre" ("through the wire").⁴ Even in the 1980s when a chain link fence had replaced those wires, residents viewed the border cavalierly. The border town of Naco, some twenty miles west of Agua Prieta, hosted a loosely organized annual "international volleyball tournament" in which the players used the fence as a net.⁵

That fence has changed. In 2012, the US invested \$14.5 million on a six-mile stretch of fence that towers eighteen feet over the Douglas/Agua Prieta border and burrows eight feet under it. "This new fencing," the area's Border Patrol chief has offered, "will greatly hinder transnational criminal organizations from attempting to commit their criminal acts."⁶ President Donald Trump's "big, beautiful wall," if ever erected, may prove an even greater hindrance to border crossing.

It will also hinder volleyball. But, then, as the Border Patrol chief infers, not many people in the area are in the mood for international frivolity. Gone are the days of the late twenties and early thirties when folks visited these twin towns to seek refuge from the elements and the law by enjoying "Douglas sunshine and Agua Prieta moonshine."⁷ Gone,

too, are the days of my youthful, relaxed wanderings through these border towns. The rise of the drug trade and the downturn in the economy, marked most prominently by the departure of Phelps Dodge have transformed these communities. Fear has replaced optimism as the sentiment common on both sides of that fence. Instead of working side-by-side in a joint quest for a bright future, folks here yearn for the peaceful days long past and watch their communities buckle under the reign of the drug cartels. Northerners blame the suppliers down south. Southerners blame their wealthy neighbors and their insatiable appetite for drugs. No one contemplates a friendly game; everybody wants to spike that volleyball.

Culture here has shifted. Now, I'm certain that my recollections of ethnic and racial equality are informed by the rose-colored glasses natural to someone who grew up on a ranch here and departed these parts before becoming burdened by the obligations of an adult trying to eke out a living on this isolated land. I mostly recall carefree days spent riding horseback with my cousins, receiving instructions from adults only to return before nightfall because the ranch lacked electricity. Certainly, there were more than a few occasions of ethnicity-based inequity and violence.



Fig 1-2: Warning sign, Cochise County, 2017.

But, Arizona *has* changed. That fence is exhibit A. The state is also now home to the infamous “breathing while brown”⁸ state immigration law that the US Supreme Court found unconstitutional.⁹ A mere judicial ruling, and a federal one at that, hasn’t tempered sentiments here. I have