

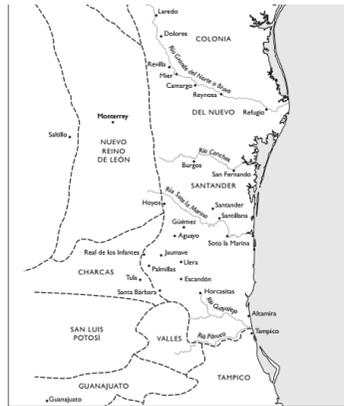
CONTESTED CITIZENSHIP: BORDER CORRIDOS, TRANSNATIONAL TIES, AND INTERCULTURAL CONFLICT

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The corridos of border conflict are rich sources for an analysis of Mexican Texans' experience with contested citizenship, transnational ties, and intercultural conflict. This essay begins with an overview of my book *River of Hope*, follows with a description of the significance of my book's major findings, and then it concludes with an analysis of several corridos in the historical context of the nineteenth-century South Texas border region. My book focuses on the region of southern Texas and northeastern Mexico where Américo Paredes was born, grew up, and where much of his scholarship was based. I first became aware of Américo Paredes' work as an undergraduate engineering major who wanted to learn more about the history of the region (the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas) where I grew up. While in graduate school in history at the University of California, Los Angeles, I read more of his scholarship and realized that corridos from the border would help me explore the identity and experiences of the border residents whom I was studying. So I examined several corridos to understand the political ideology, ethnic identity, and nationalism expressed by *tejanos* (Mexican Texans) and *mexicanos* (Mexican citizens) in the nineteenth century.¹

¹ I have used "American": as an adjective and noun when the use of United States would be inelegant with the understanding that many Latin Americans object to the appropriation of this term by *norteamericanos* (North Americans). I do not capitalize Spanish-language terms such as *mexicanos* (following standard practice in Spanish) but do capitalize English-language labels such as Mexicans (as is standard practice in English). I use *Mexican nationals* or *mexicanos* for Mexican citizens and *Mexican Americans* for American citizens. To refer to Mexicans in Texas, I use the terms *Mexican Texans* and *tejanos*. When the records fail to note citizenship, I use the term "ethnic Mexicans" to refer to people of Mexican descent

My dissertation (which became my first book) focused on the history of the Lower Rio Grande border region of which I learned very little in public school. *River of Hope* expands on the history of Nuevo Santander that Américo Paredes offered in the first chapter of “*With His Pistol in His Hand*”: *A Border Ballad and Its Hero* (7, 32). Paredes described an idyllic society of river towns established in the mid-eighteenth century by colonists accompanying José de Escandón. Engaged in livestock production, these colonists founded a series of river towns (*villas del norte*) along the *Río Bravo* (Rio Grande) with ranches on both sides of the river (see map 1). It was from this society that a complex series of intercultural relationships emerged as the region experienced a series of conquests that would eventually lead to the creation of corridos describing border conflict.



Map 1. Located along the Río Bravo (Rio Grande), the villas del norte formed the northernmost group of towns in Nuevo Santander. Circa 1750s-1820s. Map adapted by William L. Nelson

River of Hope examines state formation, cultural change, and the construction of identity in the lower Rio Grande region of southern Texas-northeastern Mexico during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It looks at how three nations--Spain, Mexico, and the United States--competed for control of this region and changed its society. The first half of the book examines the Spanish and Mexican periods (1749-1846), while the second half focuses on the development of the society north of the Rio Grande after

regardless of nationality or to refer to both Mexican nationals and Mexican Americans. See David Gutiérrez (9, 62, 66).

1848 (U.S. period). My book chronicles a history of violence resulting from multiple conquests, instances of resistance and accommodation to state power, and the changing ethnic and political identities. As Paredes has argued, residents wrote folksongs that spoke to the transformation of their identities in response to a changing culture (1993: 29-30). The redrawing of borders neither began nor ended the region's long history of unequal power relations. Nor did it lead residents to adopt singular colonial or national identities. Instead, their regionalism, transnational cultural practices, and kinship ties subverted state attempts to control and divide the population.

My book supports recent borderlands scholarship that demonstrates the limited power that colonizing peoples had in New Spain's Far North, and highlights the agency of indigenous groups. Paredes described a somewhat benign Spanish conquest of the Indians of the Rio Grande delta in which "they were neither exterminated in the English manner, nor enslaved according to the usual Spanish way" (1958: 8). The relationships of *vecinos* (community members) with local Indians were a bit more complicated and less benign than Paredes characterized them. Far from homogenous, relations between Europeans and Indians varied by region and time period, as well as by the peculiarities of Spanish communities and indigenous nations. The Spanish settler colonists who arrived in mid-eighteenth century to establish the *villas del norte* were both agents of the Spanish colonial state, and its privileged subjects. As colonial agents, the *vecinos* engaged in settler colonialism to claim the territory for Spain and to subjugate local indigenous peoples. However, a lack of adequate military support, failing missions, and economic restrictions led to fissures between the *villas del norte* and the colonial state. While missionaries played a large part in the Spanish conquest in California, settler colonists were the main agents of conquest in Nuevo Santander. As elsewhere in the northern borderlands, the colonists enslaved Indians, waged wars of extermination, and forcibly integrated indigenous servants into their society. But unlike colonists in New Mexico and elsewhere in Texas, local Spanish settlers did not engage in reciprocal taking of captives with the region's native groups. Lacking the resources and population to exert power over Spanish colonists, local Indian nations did not seize Spanish settlers, did not incorporate them into native societies, or exchange them for Indian captives. Nevertheless, local Indians did not simply react to the Spanish intrusion, but rather "created the conditions" for the development of a borderlands society. Without the region's Indians, Spanish settlers would have lacked a critical labor force and strategic allies in struggles against larger indigenous nations. As they became incorporated into

Spanish society, local Indians also increased the region's ethnic diversity and overall population. Subject to both European and indigenous empires, the lower Rio Grande region became another contested borderland whose development depended on various Indian and European nations (Valerio-Jiménez 17-50).

In *River of Hope* I also examine the *villas del norte's* internal community divisions created by unequal political and gender relations, as well as the residents' expressions of regionalism. The society was strongly patriarchal by design as the colonial and national states distributed land grants as well as military, political, and judicial positions to elite men. Paredes argued that the patriarchal vecino society with a "natural equality among men" was the result of the "democratizing influence of horse culture." Warning against characterizing this society as "democratic" in twentieth century terms, he acknowledged the society's class divisions. Social mobility, Paredes posited, allowed some peones to eventually become small landowners (1958: 10-12). My book confirms several of Paredes' arguments regarding social mobility, but my research uncovered sharper internal divisions than Paredes acknowledged or described in detail. Although women and non-elite residents faced obstacles in pursuing litigation (e.g., over property, domestic abuse, and ecclesiastical divorce), they found legal and extralegal ways to overcome disadvantageous situations on occasions. They exercised some agency in socially constructing their social identities, which were contingent on regional and temporal factors. Yet they remained subordinate members of a society in which class, gender, and race determined power, and where laws and judicial rulings created by elite men shaped their daily social interactions (Valerio-Jiménez 51-91).

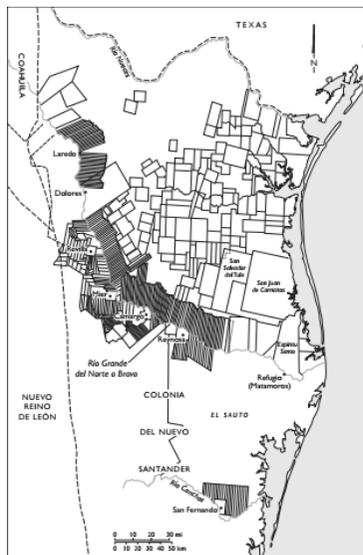
During the early nineteenth century, Mexico's War of Independence transformed the *vecinos* from Spanish subjects into Mexican citizens. Through economic and political changes, the national government sought to incorporate the northern borderlands into the nation. Its goals were partially frustrated because the *villas del norte* did not develop a strong national allegiance, but instead expressed virulent regionalism. While Paredes did not describe the river towns' regionalism in great detail, he characterized the *villas del norte* as insular communities that mistrusted outsiders (labeled *foráneos* or outsiders) from elsewhere in Mexico and from the United States (1958: 12-13). Through various acts of noncompliance, the northern towns along the Rio Grande resisted Mexico's efforts at nation building. One manifestation of the *villas'* alienation was their subversion of the Mexican government's efforts to suppress the Texas rebellion. The vecinos repeatedly refused to contribute military recruits,

loans, and housing for military officials en route to Texas. However, this refusal did not represent support for the Texas rebels, but rather an expression of extreme discontent with Mexico's national government. The vecinos adopted some of the new discourse of nationalism, but their political identification with their immediate region remained strong, and intensified as the national government continued its colonial predecessor's habit of neglecting the interests of those living on the northern periphery (Valerio-Jiménez 92-128).

American annexation introduced the second conquest of the border region within one hundred years. My book investigates the construction of an ethnic identity in a region that experienced what Américo Paredes refers to as the "dismemberment of Mexico in a very immediate way." (1993: 29). As the largest group of Mexican communities bisected by the imposition of the international boundary, the lower Rio Grande is a critical region in which to examine identity transformations through multiple stages of conquest. The colonists who had dominated the region's Indians in the mid-eighteenth century became a conquered people, as Anglo American newcomers began to gain power over them. Serving as agents of the United States, *americanos* (Anglo Americans) advanced its state formation by controlling local governments and passing legislation to regulate Mexican cultural practices. Shortly after the end of the U.S.-Mexican War, each Mexican *villa* was paired with an American town across the river. These towns transformed the geography on the river's left bank into a series of communities, which mirrored the older *villas del norte* (see map 2). Throughout these new American towns, the *tejano* elite lost political and economic power, while the poor became increasingly criminalized. Most faced political and social exclusion from the community that emerged on the U.S. side of the border after the U.S.-Mexican War. Instead of gaining acceptance as equals, as promised in the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, they became second-class citizens. Ultimately, the conflict created by their exclusion became part of Mexican Texans' struggle to gain full citizenship rights. My book supports recent scholarship, which demonstrates that Mexican Americans' concern over civil rights began in the mid-nineteenth century (Valerio-Jiménez 129-175).

The introduction of the American legal system led to significant social change in the border counties. The Mexican Texan elite witnessed its power over workers diminish and their own property holdings decrease as Anglo American newcomers challenged their land titles. In order to counteract their displacement, the *tejano* upper class established political and social alliances with *americanos*. Various scholars have documented

the loss of land suffered by Mexican Americans (including in South Texas) after the U.S. takeover. So I focused on other social and political changes. Adapting to the American legal system was difficult for the Mexican Texan elite, but it was much tougher for middling and poor workers, who had limited access to attorneys, fewer opportunities for alliances with the Anglos, and less legal knowledge. The postwar jurisdictional change did improve workers' mobility, because indebted labor was no longer legal in the annexed lands. This labor freedom attracted additional workers from Mexico who crossed the river to escape their debts and to obtain higher wages. The permeability of the border allowed the passage of people and goods despite the U.S. and Mexican governments' attempt to impose restrictions – including labor controls. *River of Hope* describes how indebted laborers from Mexico and African American slaves from the U.S. crossed the river in opposite directions to escape repressive labor restrictions. Their actions demonstrated creativity, resourcefulness, and agency. The flow of Mexican workers and artisans seeking better working conditions and higher wages into Texas represented an early immigration wave that reinforced Mexican culture but also created nascent tensions with Mexican Americans (Valerio-Jiménez 176-189).



Map 2. The twin cities along the Lower Rio Grande. Circa 1850s-1890s. Map adapted by William L. Nelson.

Marital relations also changed as women obtained more power to sue over domestic abuse, file for divorce, and remarry in civil ceremonies. Mexican American women took advantage of changes in legal jurisdiction to legally separate from abusive or neglectful husbands, protect themselves from violent partners, and obtain more individual power in marital choices. In some cases, couples married in Mexico, but divorced in Texas because Mexico did not allow civil divorce until 1917. In 1852, a sixteen-year-old, Antonia Díaz, and a twenty-nine-year-old, Felipe Cuéllar, traveled from their homes in Carrizo, Texas, across the Rio Grande to Guerrero, Tamaulipas, to be married. Four years removed from annexation by the United States, Carrizo did not have a church yet. Díaz and Cuéllar wed in Mexico because Guerrero was the site of the nearest Catholic Church and probably the home of some relatives. The couple established a home in Texas, where their daughter, Josefina, was born in 1859. In that year, Felipe abandoned Antonia and returned to Mexico, whereupon Antonia filed for divorce in Zapata County. Their marriage had dissolved, according to Antonia, because Felipe “was guilty of excesses, cruel treatment, and outrages toward her of such a character as to render their living together insupportable.” Antonia remained in Texas and gave birth to another daughter in 1863. As a single mother, she supported her surviving children as a seamstress, and witnessed Josefina marry in Mexico in 1874. Divorce also benefitted men as demonstrated by the experience of Catarino Garza, a Mexican revolutionary who immigrated to Texas. Garza is famous for leading an insurrection against Mexican dictator Porfirio Díaz from his base in the South Texas region. Garza married Concepción González, his second wife, in 1890, and obtained financing for his insurrection from his father-in-law (see figure 1).

What is less well known is that Garza first married Carolina O’Conner (an Irish American woman) after he immigrated to Texas, but subsequently divorced her in a civil court in Texas. Had Catarino Garza stayed in Mexico, he would not have been able to divorce, nor would he have been allowed to remarry, which he did legally in civil courts in Texas (Valerio-Jiménez 87, 205-221).

In addition to the class-based discrimination prevalent in Mexico, *tejanos* confronted new obstacles because of their ethnic background (which *americanos* perceived as a “race”). Moreover, Anglo newcomers launched Americanization programs designed to change Mexican Texans’ choice of religion, language, and culture. While these programs were most prevalent among Protestant missionaries, the Catholic Church also pursued forms of Americanization, but their efforts did not meet as much resistance from *tejanos*. Overall, elite Mexican Texan men lost power, but the border

counties' political and economic organization remained strongly patriarchal, with Anglo American men replacing the former Mexican elite (Valerio-Jiménez 201-205).



Figure 1. Catarino Garza and Concepción González on their wedding day, 23 May 1890, in San Diego, Texas. Garza's first wife, Carolina O'Conner, had successfully sued for divorce from Garza on 13 November 1889 in Cameron County. Courtesy of the Pérez and Tijerina families.

Mexican Texans and Mexican nationals assumed several identities as they adapted to the structures of domination imposed by Mexico and the United States. They claimed to be American citizens when they believed this identity would improve their lives, and they claimed themselves citizens of Mexico when American citizenship proved detrimental. The ability of border residents to assume various concurrent national, regional, and ethnic identities reveals the dynamic nature of identity formation. It also demonstrates residents' use of multiple identities as strategic tools. Yet cleavages between Mexican nationals and Mexican Texans did emerge in the nineteenth century as a result of Mexican immigration to the United States, which complicated voting, citizenship, and economic opportunities for *tejanos*. Several historians have described the tension between Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans for the twentieth century, so my work extends some of these findings back to the nineteenth century.

These divisions and Mexican Texans' daily experience as subordinate members of U.S. society led to the development of an emergent ethnic identity that separated Mexican Texans from Mexican nationals. Political conflicts and civil wars in both nations attracted male border residents simultaneously, and encouraged border *mexicanos* to assume transnational identities. As Paredes acknowledged, the *tejanos* along the Texas-Mexico border continued to identify with Mexico as they became involved in that nation's republican struggle against the French invaders, but also identified with the United States when they joined Confederate and Union forces during the U.S. Civil War (Paredes 1958: 23-25). They were typical transnational actors who could draw on social networks on both sides of the border. Although scholars of transnational immigrants mostly focus on the twentieth century, my research demonstrates that these processes had earlier origins.

My work also confirms other scholarship on borders, which argues that national identities had more valence along borders than in far away capitals. Mexican nationals supported the rebels led by Juan Cortina in 1859, while *tejanos* lent support to various political factions in Mexico. Several Cortinistas subsequently fought with the Mexican Liberal Army, but also became important military allies to Union forces in Texas. Other border *mexicanos* joined the Confederacy and supported the French intervention in Mexico. The concurrent civil wars created a chaotic situation along the Rio Grande because of the frequent incursions of military forces into the neighboring country and the constant back-and-forth flow of deserters. In the United States, Mexicans participated in a civil war concerned with citizenship, freedom, and the abolition of slavery; in Mexico, they participated in a struggle over Mexico's sovereignty against an invading European power. In both wars, they involved themselves in the processes of nation building and asserted their respective identities as border residents, American citizens, Mexican nationals, and transnational actors. Mexican nationals fled from political instability and dire economic circumstances into the U.S., while Mexican Texans escaped into Mexico to avoid discrimination and legal injustice. Both groups manipulated citizenship laws to their advantage and demonstrated their strategic adaptation to respective national cultures (Valerio-Jiménez 222-274).

My arguments in *River of Hope* were strengthened by my use of corridos in order to understand *tejanos*' ideology and political sentiments. After the U.S. takeover and the corresponding displacement of Mexican municipal officials by Anglo Americans, the language used in local government documents, newspapers, and official correspondence changed

from Spanish to English. With few exceptions, elite Anglo American men wrote most of these documents for the South Texas region. In order to examine the lives of women, Mexican Texans, African Americans and the poor, I creatively analyzed primary sources authored mostly by powerful men. One of the few sources that were created by non-elite *tejanos* in the post-annexation period were corridos, and these songs (containing their views of ideology and citizenship) have the added benefit that they contain a counter-narrative to the traditional history of Anglo-American settlement. Corridos also express a community voice on “border conflict,” which Paredes argued was the subject of many border folksongs (Paredes 1976: 21-22).

Nineteenth-century corridos from the U.S.-Mexico border are wonderfully rich sources for the exploration of cultural change, identity, and regionalism. These corridos are critical primary sources for scholars interested in studying communities who did not leave many written documents containing their views on ideology and citizenship. In the next section, I will analyze songs about Juan N. Cortina, Ignacio Zaragoza, and Ulysses S. Grant, which were recovered and first analyzed by Américo Paredes (1976: 22-25). My analysis demonstrates that *tejanos* in the nineteenth century embodied multiple identities, demonstrated regional pride, and expressed nationalist sympathies. Although outsiders viewed border residents’ identities as contradictory, the local residents’ self-perception as Mexican nationals, Americans, and *tejanos* all at the same time appeared unambiguous to them. Mexican Texans expressed a political affinity with the United States, but also felt connected to Mexico, just as Mexican nationals had links to the United States. Mexican Texans, I argue, were influenced by and understood the ideological issues involved in the U.S. Civil War and Mexico’s war against French intervention. In addition to the corridos’ international and local influences, the settings of the songs demonstrated transnational bonds, as the songs were performed at various events, including at Cinco de Mayo festivities in which American citizens (Mexican Texans) celebrated Mexican nationalism in an American border town. Ultimately, the songs served as reminders that the processes of state formation of both nations influenced, but did not completely shape, the identities of ethnic Mexicans in the political and cultural borderland of south Texas.

It was into this border society that Juan Nepomuceno Cortina was born on May 16, 1824, in Camargo, Tamaulipas. Juan Cortina was a descendant of eighteenth-century military colonists who established the *villas del norte*, and his mother was the owner of the vast Espiritu Santo land grant in present-day Cameron County, Texas. Cortina experienced the change of

jurisdiction in the mid-nineteenth century, and allegedly fought on the side of Mexico during the U.S.-Mexican War. After the war, he and his family gained U.S. citizenship as they remained on their land grant, which now was part of the United States. Cortina is remembered for leading a six-month long rebellion in South Texas that was sparked by an incident of police brutality. In July 1859, a Brownsville marshal had pistol-whipped a drunken former worker of Rancho El Carmen (owned by Cortina's mother). Refusing Cortina's request to stop the beating, Marshal Bob Shears replied with an insult. Cortina then shot the marshal and rode out of town carrying the worker on his horse. Officials filed charges against Cortina, but failed to capture him. His unsuccessful efforts to have the legal charges dismissed, along with *mexicanos'* growing resentment, eventually led to a raid the following September. Cortina's forces, an estimated 350 to 600 men, gained popularity by defeating local and state militias.² By the mid-1970s, several white historians had written books that characterized Cortina as a "thief" and "murderer," while Chicano historians portrayed Cortina as a "Robin Hood" character who stole from the rich to give to the poor. Paredes argued that both characterizations were wrong because Cortina had political goals meant to provide "dignity and social justice" to *tejanos* (Paredes 1976: 23). My research confirmed Paredes' interpretation of Cortina's rebellion as having political motivations, and reaffirmed his prescient analysis of a man that Paredes described as the first border Mexican to "fight for his right with his pistol in his hand (Paredes 1958: 134).

A combined force of Texas Rangers and federal army troops eventually suppressed the rebellion, but not before the conflict caused widespread devastation and the abandonment of many ranches from Brownsville to Rio Grande City. During this uprising, the Cortinistas, as the rebels were known, issued several *pronunciamientos* (proclamations) to explain their motivations. Printed in Spanish and English, the proclamations circulated on both sides of the border, and contained an incisive critique of U.S. annexation. These proclamations would serve to publicize memories of conquest among Cortina's contemporaries and for future generations. They are also examples of the social and political uses of collective memories. Among the proclamations' grievances were the devastating property losses of elite *tejanos* (including Cortina's family), and the criminalization and legal persecution of the poor. The proclamations specifically accused lawyers, judges, and law-enforcement officers of

² See *American Flag Extra*, 1 (October 1859); Charles William Goldfinch and José Tomás Canales (5, 42-43); Chatfield (23); Thompson (2007: 11-12, 39).

cooperating to deprive Mexican Texans of property rights and equal protection under the law.³ One of the rebels' first actions was to free prisoners, because the insurgents correctly believed the biases of local juries led to the increasing imprisonment of Mexican Texans in municipal jails and the state's penitentiaries. Tracing this unjust treatment to U.S. annexation, they accused the United States of failing to uphold *tejanos'* citizenship rights.⁴ The rebellion gave the Cortinistas an opportunity to describe their dashed expectations of U.S. citizenship. They argued that Mexican nationals had chosen to live in the United States after witnessing Mexico's political turmoil, and because "since the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, they [Mexican nationals] have been attracted to its soil [U.S.] by the soft influence of wise laws and the advantages of a free government." These expectations, however, were not fulfilled. Summarizing their disappointment, the Cortinistas claimed the promises offered by U.S. citizenship were, in reality, "the baseless fabric of a dream."⁵

The violation of property rights was a significant factor in the rebels' mobilization. As an heir of the vast Espiritu Santo Spanish land grant, Estefana Goseascochea de Cortina, Cortina's mother, forfeited part of her estate to the city of Brownsville. She lost additional property as a payment to lawyers for establishing legal claim to her land in American courts. Cortina believed attorneys and land speculators had conspired to dispossess his family and other *tejanos*. Squatters harassed and terrorized land-grant families, while land developers challenged *tejanos'* titles and forced them to defend their property in court. Simmering racial tensions were another factor in the widespread discontent. "Lawless and unprincipled Americans," wrote a visiting government official, "were much in the habit of grossly maltreating the Mexicans who visited Brownsville, even to the taking of life." In the decade after the war, vigilantes had killed several *mexicanos* but had gone unpunished, which drew the rebels' ire.⁶ So the stage was set for the rebellion that began several months later.

In the early morning of September 28, 1859, approximately seventy-five ethnic Mexican men left a Mexican Independence ball in Matamoros,

³ Thompson (23); "Difficulties on Southwestern Frontier" (hereafter DSF), 36th Congress, 1st. session, no. 52, Vol. 7 (1859-1860), serial no. 1050. Washington, D.C.: Thomas H. Ford, Printer (1860: 71, 79-82); Roberto Calderón (265-277); Armando C. Alonzo (259-270).

⁴ *American Flag* (26 November 1859); DSF 81 (quotes); Goldfinch and Canales (42-43).

⁵ *American Flag* (26 November 1859); DSF 71-72 (second quote), 80 (first quote).

⁶ Alonzo (147-48); Montejano (43-47); DSF 65, W. P. Reyburn to F. A. Hatch (21 November 1859); Goldfinch and Canales (17-41); Thompson (28-32, 37-38).

rode across the Rio Grande, and gained control of Brownsville. Led by Juan Cortina, they began searching for several *americanos* who had gone unpunished after killing *mexicanos*. The Cortinistas skirmished with Brownsville's law enforcement officials, shot some of their foes, and released prisoners from the county jail. Feeling overpowered, local authorities appealed to Mexico's National Guard, as well as to political and military leaders from Matamoros, who persuaded the Cortinistas to relinquish control of Brownsville that evening. The rebels, who suffered only one casualty, left four dead and a town in turmoil, but the conflict would continue for months.⁷

Two days later, the Cortinistas issued a *pronunciamento* to explain the purpose of their raid. Gathered at Rancho El Carmen, the rebels addressed the inhabitants of Texas and, specifically, Brownsville's residents, through a well-written tract defending their actions. English- and Spanish-language versions of the *pronunciamento* circulated on both sides of the border. The purpose of the raid, they announced, had been to punish those persecuting and robbing them for "no other crime on our part than that of being of Mexican origin." Asserting their American citizenship, they protested the intervention of Matamoros officials and troops. "Not having renounced our rights as North American citizens," they stated, "we disapprove, and energetically protest, against the act of having caused a force of the national guards from Mexico to cross unto this side to ingraft [*sic*] themselves in a question so foreign to their country."⁸ The content of the Cortinistas' proclamations confirm Paredes' characterization of the rebellion as motivated by political issues.

Several local politicians and merchants portrayed the Cortinistas as outsiders instead of accepting them as fellow U.S. citizens. A European-American group formed a committee of safety to coordinate the city's defense, and requested military assistance from the Texas governor-elect and from the U.S. president. In their request letters, they denounced the Cortinistas as non-resident criminals who had invaded Brownsville to kill every resident against whom they held a grudge. According to the committee members, the raiders had shouted pro-Mexico slogans and even threatened to raise the Mexican flag over the city. The local English-

⁷ *American Flag Extra*, 1 (October 1859); Goldfinch and Canales (42-43); Chatfield (23). Mexican Independence-day festivities had been postponed for unknown reasons. See Thompson (11-12, 39).

⁸ Juan Nepomuceno Cortina to the inhabitants of the State of Texas, 30 September 1859, DSF, 70-72. By using proclamations to disseminate his ideas, Cortina followed a long-standing Mexican political tradition. Thompson (12, 46); Elliott Young (111-117).

language newspaper characterized Cortina's followers as "all Mexicans by nativity" with "most of them [being] outlaws from Mexico" and accused them of "trampling on all law and upon the rights of our population."⁹

The contrasting views of *americanos* and Cortinistas illustrate that citizenship had become a contested issue in the border region within twelve years of American annexation. The competing discourses reflected a deep dispute over social and political belonging to local communities and to the larger imagined political community of the nation (Anderson 5-6). The Cortinistas' actions also reveal transnational influences as *tejanos* participated in a Mexican independence celebration in Matamoros, and afterward joined Mexican nationals in protesting injustice in the United States. While this cooperation might appear contradictory, the joint action illustrates social and cultural ties that transcended the international boundary. Such transnational influences emerged in the mid-nineteenth century precisely because the newly imposed boundary divided an ethnic community whose history on this land predated the reconfigured border. Ultimately, *tejanos* claimed the rights of American citizenship in order to secure equal treatment as landowners, litigants, voters, and officeholders. *Tejano* assertions of citizenship occurred in mostly male domains of armed struggles and electoral contests, so their actions can also be interpreted as masculine claims of belonging to local and national imaginaries. Their struggles reveal a determination to adapt to the imposed political structure by employing ethnicity and identity as tools to resist domination.

According to Américo Paredes, border residents wrote several corridos about Cortina, but he was only able to recover fragments of three different versions. The number of corridos about Cortina is indicative of his popularity on both sides of the border. These are among the oldest corridos of border conflict. The corridos about Cortina are also important because they "helped establish a tradition of socially symbolic artforms in the Mexican American communities of the Southwest," according to literary scholar Ramón Saldivar, and became models for subsequent corridos such as "Los pronunciados" and "Los sediciosos" (Saldivar 28).

1st corrido:

Ese general Cortinas es
libre y muy soberano,
Han subido sus honores porque
salvó a un mexicano.

⁹ *American Flag* (26 November 1859); Stephen Powers, et. al., to James Buchanan, President of the United States (2 October 1859), DSF: 19-20; Henry Webb, et. al., to Hardin R. Runnels, Governor of the State of Texas (2 October 1859), DSF: 20-23.

The famed General Cortinas is
quite sovereign and free,
The honor due him is greater, for
he saved a Mexican's life. (Paredes 1976: 47-48)

In the first corrido about the shooting of Marshal Bob Shears (this is the incident that sparked the rebellion), the lyrics refer to Cortina's actions to save the life of a mexicano. The corrido's author used *mexicano* as an ethnic identifier and not as an indication of nationality. At the time, it was common for ethnic Mexican border residents to refer to themselves as *mexicanos* regardless of their citizenship. The worker was likely a Mexican Texan who had obtained U.S. citizenship with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, but he might have also been one of many workers who fled indebted labor in Mexico for higher wages and more freedom in Texas. This corrido was written several years after the 1859 rebellion when Cortina had risen to the rank of general in the Mexican army (see figure 2).



Figure 2. Juan Nepomuceno Cortina, a descendant of a land grant family in Cameron County, became famous for leading an 1859 rebellion, and later helping the Union Army recruit on both sides of the border. Juan N. Cortina, ca. 1870s, in Mexican military uniform. Courtesy of the Brownsville Historical Association.

Because this is the only surviving fragment, we can only guess at the rest of the lyrics. By choosing to use *mexicano* as an ethnic identifier, the author portrayed the conflict with the Anglo American marshal as an ethnic conflict. The lyrics follow the pattern of Cortina's proclamations in portraying a united Mexican community without internal class conflicts (which were very much present). In his initial intervention to stop the marshal's beating of the Mexican worker, followed by the rebellion, Cortina and his supporters were identified as a united Mexican community with no emphasis on internal class divisions. In fact, the proclamations make a point of decrying both the Mexican American elite's property losses, and the poor's criminalization and disproportionate imprisonment (Valerio-Jiménez 224-228).

After the 1859 rebellion, Cortina moved to Mexico and held various political and military positions. Once Porfirio Díaz came to power in 1876, the United States pressured Mexico's government to remove Cortina from the border because U.S. officials believed Cortina was responsible for widespread cattle theft from Texas ranches. Díaz complied by capturing Cortina and jailing him in Mexico City because Díaz sought to attract foreign capital, including U.S. investors, to spur Mexico's development. By this time, Cortina had long been a thorn in the side of Texas officials by leading a rebellion, supporting and recruiting for the Union during the U.S. Civil War despite Texas' support for the Confederacy, and by allegedly encouraging the large-scale cattle theft that broke out along the border in the 1870s. In *River of Hope*, I demonstrated that U.S. officials typically accused only Mexicans (from both sides of the border), and American Indians for the cattle theft despite the active participation of Anglo American cattle thieves and Anglo American ranchers who willingly bought the stolen cattle. This blanket accusation against many ethnic Mexicans for cattle theft also contributed to their criminalization. Díaz had Cortina arrested in 1876, and jailed in Mexico City where he remained for the rest of his life. Díaz, however, permitted Cortina to visit the border in 1890 before his death in 1892 (Valerio-Jiménez 263-269, 275-277). The second corrido concerns Cortina's visit to the border, while the third corrido is about Cortina's death.

2nd corrido:

Viva el general Cortinas
que de su prisión salió,
Vino a ver a sus amigos
que en Tamaulipas dejó.

Long live General Cortinas,
 who has come out of his prison;
 He came to visit his friends
 that he had left in Tamaulipas.

3rd corrido:

Los Americanos hacían huelga,
 borracheras en las cantinas,
 De gusto que había muerto
 ese general Cortinas.

The Americans made merry,
 they got drunk in the saloons,
 Out of joy over the death
 of the famed General Cortinas. (Paredes 1976: 47-48).

The corrido fragments from the second and third corrido demonstrate Cortina's continued popularity along the border despite his decades-long jail term in Mexico City. Besides describing Cortina's visit to the border following his prison sentence in the nation's capital, the second corrido also links Cortina to many friends in Tamaulipas (one of Mexico's states bordering Texas). Following his 1859 raid, Juan Cortina moved to Mexico, and plunged headlong into politics. He joined the Mexican Army, led the Matamoros *ayuntamiento*, and ultimately became the governor of Tamaulipas. As a Mexican Army commander, Cortina assisted Union forces, and interceded on behalf of *tejanos* mistreated during the U.S. Civil War. Subsequently, he allied himself with the liberal forces of Benito Juárez against French occupation, and fought incessant power struggles with northern Mexico's political strongmen. By 1875, Cortina had left the governor's office and regained leadership of the Matamoros *ayuntamiento*. When the "Cattle War" erupted in the 1870s, U.S. authorities accused Cortina of masterminding livestock theft throughout the border region despite evidence that Anglo Americans and American Indians also participated in the theft. The second corrido fragment is also an expression of pride in a northern Mexican regional identity (in a *patria chica*, or locality), and demonstrates the persistent difficulties faced by the Mexican federal government in forging a nation in the nineteenth century (Thompson 29-48, 67-73).

The third corrido fragment states what many border Mexicans believed: that Anglo Americans were happy that Cortina had died because he had caused so much turmoil for Anglo American authorities. By identifying Americans as joyful over the death while neglecting to note that Cortina's enemies in Mexico were probably similarly pleased, the

song emphasizes the role of the caudillo in influencing developments north of the border. The absence of Cortina's *mexicano* and *tejano* foes in these lyrics constructs the border troubles as primarily rooted in ethnic conflict. The songs' omission of class divisions among ethnic Mexicans suggests Cortina's ability to attract support among the poor, through patronage and his ability to give voice to their concerns. Composed and sung primarily by men, these corridos can also be interpreted as male expressions of approval; they celebrate Cortina's performance of masculinity as a patriarch who defended his community from outsiders. Sung in Mexico and Texas, these corridos demonstrate that Mexican nationals and Mexican Texans held Cortina in high regard as a man who had defended ethnic Mexicans on both sides of the Rio Grande.

Since folksongs are expressions of community sentiment, these surviving fragments are exemplary of the popular memories of *fronterizos* (border residents, or sons of the *patria chica* of the border region). While newspapers minimally acknowledged Cortina's death, ethnic Mexicans honored him with corridos immortalizing his influence. Notably, none of the surviving corrido fragments refer to class or citizenship divisions among ethnic Mexicans. While poor residents were obviously aware of these divisions and the daily impact on their lives, their choice to deemphasize them in these corridos speaks to another aspect of border life. By the late nineteenth century, border residents had grown accustomed to the transnational influences that shaped their lives and connected communities across an international border. Far from passive, *fronterizos* were active agents in asserting an early type of transnational citizenship in which they expressed allegiances to Mexico and the United States. Yet, at other times, they remained ambivalent to each nation, especially when central governments ignored their needs. As the scholars Michael Peter Smith and Matt Bakker remind us, loyalty is "never unalloyed and always contingent."¹⁰

In addition to challenges to and grudging confirmations of their citizenship, transnational events also affected *tejanos* as demonstrated by the corrido of Ignacio Zaragoza. The multiple influences on Mexican Texans' identities were richly illustrated at a "Cinco de Mayo" celebration in Zapata County in 1867. A local guitarist and songwriter, Onofre Cárdenas, sang two *corridos* that he composed for the festivities in the town of San Ignacio, Texas. Drawing on the national anthems of Mexico and France for the music, Cárdenas turned to local folklore tradition for

¹⁰ Paredes (1976: 47-48); Thompson (1986: 245-47); Michael Peter Smith and Matt Bakker (78, 167-168).

his lyrics. The first song, “To Zaragoza,” honored the memory of Ignacio Seguín Zaragoza, a hero of the Battle of Puebla on May 5, 1862. “To Zaragoza” aptly illustrates Cardenas’s knowledge of various international genres, as he borrowed from romantic Mexican ballads, Spanish musical comedies, and military rhythms. Zaragoza was born at Bahía del Espíritu Santo near present-day Goliad, Texas, in 1829. His father was from Veracruz, while his mother was from Bexar (present-day San Antonio). Significantly, his mother was a relative of Juan Seguín, who participated in the Texas rebellion, and later became mayor of San Antonio from 1840 to 1842.¹¹ As mayor, Seguín attempted to defend Mexican Texans from Anglo American squatters and became subject to vigilante threats that forced him to flee to Mexico. Like Seguín, Ignacio Zaragoza’s family fled to Mexico to escape the racial violence directed against ethnic Mexicans in the aftermath of the Texas secessionist rebellion. Zaragoza attended school in the Mexican border city of Matamoros before his family moved to Monterrey, Nuevo León, where Zaragoza joined the military. He rose up the military ranks to become Minister of War and Navy under President Benito Juárez. But he is best known for leading the Mexican Army in the Battle of Puebla on May 5, 1862, when his troops defended the town against French Imperial forces.¹²

The lyrics describe the Battle of Puebla, in which Mexican troops defeated the occupying French army, and urged Mexicans not to forget the battle or its heroes.

Dios te salve, valiente Zaragoza,
 invicto general de la frontera ...
 El pueblito y sus autoridades
 tu nombre ensalzan repetidas veces.

God save thee, brave Zaragoza,
 unconquerable general of the border ...
 This little town and its authorities
 exalt your name on numerous occasions.

Los hijos de la Patria te saludan,
 solemnizando tu triunfo en este día,

¹¹ Seguín was the last ethnic Mexican mayor of San Antonio until Henry Cisneros was elected in 1981.

¹² The celebration of Cinco de Mayo developed very differently in the United States, where it has become more popular than in Mexico, where it is scarcely observed. For a detailed analysis of the role of California’s *juntas patrióticas mejicanas* in promoting cinco de mayo, see David Hayes-Bautista (chapters 2-4).

los venideros también con alegría
bendecirán tu nombre sin cesar.

The sons of the Fatherland salute you,
celebrating your triumph on this day;
those to come also joyfully
will bless your name unceasingly.

El pueblito y sus autoridades
tu nombre ensalzan repetidas veces
porque fuiste el terror de los franceses
en Guadalupe, Loreto y en San Juan.

This little town and its authorities
exalt your name on numberless occasions
because you were the terror of the French
at Guadalupe, Loreto, and San Juan.

La mañana del cinco de mayo
que con muy pocos soldados mexicanos
un golpe rudo le diste a los tiranos
que a Puebla se acercaban con afán.

The morning of the fifth of May,
when with a handful of Mexican soldiers
you dealt a rude blow to the tyrants
who were eagerly approaching Puebla.

No olviden, mexicanos
que en el cinco de mayo
los zuavos como un rayo
corrieron ¡para atrás!
Tirando cuanto traían,
Los que a Puebla venían
Apurados decían:
- ¡Pelear es por demás!

Mexicans, don't forget
that on the fifth of May
the Zouaves, with lightning speed,
ran toward the rear!
Casting off all that they carried,
they who were coming to Puebla
exclaimed in their haste,
"It is useless to fight." (Paredes 1976: 51)

According to Américo Paredes, “To Zaragoza” is emblematic of border *tejanos*’ dynamic and contingent position within competing national imaginaries: the narrator is alternately a U.S. citizen, a Mexican citizen, and a proud *fronterizo*. The corrido’s narrative voice begins from the perspective of a *fronterizo*, who depicts Zaragoza as an “unconquerable general of the border” and not as a Mexican officer. This characterization suggests regional pride for a *fronterizo* who became a Mexican national hero. The narrator’s perspective then shifts to that of U.S. citizens (namely Union supporters or “I and free men”), who salute Zaragoza’s (meaning Mexico’s) flag. The narrative voice ends with the views of Mexican citizens, “sons of the Fatherland,” who revel with pride and nationalism at the French defeat. Municipal celebrations in border towns during subsequent years undoubtedly affirmed this binational and regional pride.¹³

The U.S. Civil War also attracted support from *mexicanos* on both sides of the Rio Grande. During the Civil War, Anglo American doubts about Mexican Texan citizenship receded into the background. This occurred because, as the border region’s strategic and economic importance grew, the Confederacy and Union needed *tejano* support. The Confederacy began exporting cotton across the Rio Grande, one of the few areas to escape the Union blockade. Cotton initially flowed out of Brazos Santiago at the southern tip of Texas but Confederate officials, facing pressure from federal forces, shifted operations to the Mexican port of Bagdad, along the beach in Matamoros. This trade, which exported cotton from the southern states to Europe while importing manufactured goods and war supplies, fueled a period of prosperity and population boom along the border from 1861 to 1865.¹⁴

The Rio Grande region’s strategic importance encouraged the Confederacy and the Union to enlist Mexicans regardless of citizenship. Recruited from both sides of the border, an estimated 2,550 Mexicans joined Confederate troops and 960 became Union soldiers. Texas’s Confederate draft explains the skewed numbers. The forced conscription of Mexican Texans pulled so many cartmen out of work that it threatened to curtail trade between Texas and Mexico. B́exar, Refugio, and Webb Counties supplied many Mexican Texan Confederates, while Cameron, Hidalgo, and Nueces Counties contributed most *tejano* Unionists. Border Unionists launched their first armed action in April 1861, and fought one

¹³ Paredes (1976: 24-25, 49-51); Paredes (1971: 216-220); *Daily Ranchero* (5 May 1870; 7 May 1870).

¹⁴ Irby (1-10); Thompson (2007: 40-43); Hinojosa (87); Calvert (123); Graf (489-491, 577); *Daily Ranchero* (15 June 1867).

of the last battles of the war in May 1865. Although most soldiers were concentrated along the border, Mexican troops fought battles throughout Texas, in neighboring Louisiana and New Mexico, and as far away as Virginia and Georgia (Thompson 1986: 3, 43; 1977: 26-27; 56-57; 92-93; 123).

While the border economy was not dependent on slavery, the peculiar institution did influence the region and led ethnic Mexicans to participate in the war. Only fourteen slaves (all owned by Anglos) lived in the border counties in 1860 because slaves could easily escape into Mexico. Although *tejanos* owned slaves across the state (sixty in 1860), most lived far from the border. Some Mexican Texans helped slaves flee across the international border, while others pursued runaway slaves into Mexico. The wealthy tended to side with the Confederacy due to alliances with Democrats and slave owners. In turn, poor ethnic Mexicans usually sided with the Union against the largely pro-Confederate *americano* minority. Although a few *tejanos* captured runaway slaves in Mexico, most border residents did not cooperate with slave owners despite bounties of two hundred to five hundred dollars on runaways.¹⁵

Scholars have also argued that *tejanos* chose sides according to their socioeconomic class because they lacked an “ideological orientation towards the conflict.” According to this view, the wealthy chose the Confederacy because they had alliances with the Democratic Party and with white slave owners, whereas the poor chose the Union because of their resentment against the “growing Anglo-Texan political and economic dominance of their communities.” This resentment was particularly true for the South Texas border region, where a history of racial antagonisms fueled the desire of poor Mexican Texans to seek revenge on the largely pro-Confederate white minority by joining the Union troops (Thompson viii, 17). Yet this explanation for *tejanos*’ involvement assumes that they were motivated only by economic factors and political resentments and not by ideology. It also fails to account for the number of poor Confederate supporters or elite and middling Union backers. Another historian argues that “the mass of Tejanos could not identify with the philosophical origins of the war” (De León 47). Speaking of residents of Laredo, yet another scholar states that “most of the townspeople probably did not have any expectations of owning slaves, had never heard of abolitionists, and did not understand the economic and political rivalry between the North and the South” (Hinojosa 81, 83).

¹⁵ See Arnoldo De León (49-52); Sean Kelley (714); Thompson (1986: viii).

These interpretations are puzzling. Some might be a result of undue influence by primary sources authored by Anglo-Texan residents who held patronizing views of *tejanos*. Other scholars might have offered such historical interpretations after failing to find a significant number of written sources authored by Mexican Texans. Whatever the reasons, these interpretations discount the ability of *tejanos* to understand political issues in the United States as well as the reality that many Mexican Texans acted on such beliefs.

Contrary to these interpretations, I argue that Mexican Texans chose to participate in the sectional conflict because they understood the reasons over which the Civil War was fought. Although slaves were not a large part of the border region's labor force, their actions to seek freedom directly affected local residents. Some Mexican Texans, for example, helped slaves flee across the international border, others captured runaway slaves in Texas, and still others pursued runaway slaves into Mexico and returned them to the United States. After the outbreak of the Civil War, *tejanos* and *mexicanos* joined both the Confederate and Union armies. Most of the Union and Confederate recruits were illiterate laborers, farmers, and herdsmen, but their numbers also included shoemakers and masons as well as literate former officeholders and rancheros. Approximately 11 percent of the troops were literate, leading some historians to believe that the mass of illiterate recruits failed to understand the ideological motivations for the war (Thompson 17). But was literacy necessary to understand the issues that triggered the war? Were poor whites in the backcountry of West Virginia or African Americans in Georgia sufficiently literate? Moreover, did these soldiers need to be literate to understand the intricacies of the conflict? If not, then why do scholars insist on judging *tejanos* and *mexicanos* by such standards?

The Civil War brought several unresolved issues, such as slavery, citizenship, and political participation, to a head in Texas. Although these issues had different salience along the border than in other regions, they nevertheless motivated residents to take sides. Like other ethnic groups throughout Texas and the nation, Mexican Texans displayed sharp divisions during the Civil War and had complex, and often contradictory, reasons for participating in the conflict. Clearly, many *tejanos* knew the conflict's causes and significance, and made conscious choices about whether or not to participate. By soldiering in the Civil War for the Union, they staked a claim to American citizenship at the same time that they reflected the reality of life along the border.

The second song that Onofre Cárdenas composed was musically similar to the corrido for Zaragoza, but it praised a hero of the American Civil War.

¡Viva Grant! ¡Viva Grant! ciudadanos,
que cinco años la guerra sostuvo,
y un ejército enorme mantuvo
en defensa de la libertad.

Long live Grant! Long live Grant! citizens,
who sustained the war for five years,
and maintained an enormous army
in defense of liberty.

Y después de sangrientos combates,
do murieron valientes soldados,
fueron libres aquellos estados que
jamás pretendían la igualdad.

And after bloody battles
in which brave soldiers died,
those states were free
that had never aspired to equality.

!Dios te salve, caudillo del Norte!
Yo saludo tu sacra bandera,
que en el mundo flamea por doquiera,
ofreciendo la paz y la unión.

God save thee, chieftain of the North!
I salute your holy flag
that flutters everywhere in the world,
offering peace and unity.

También México ensalza tu nombre
porque fuiste con él indulgente
fuiste siempre y serás el valiente
que defiende la Constitución.

Mexico too exalts your name
because you were kind toward it;
you have always been and shall be the brave one;
the defender of the Constitution. (Paredes 1976: 24, 52-53).

The corrido “To Grant” praised the leadership of Ulysses S. Grant in leading the Union forces to victory over the Confederacy. By acknowledging that the Union’s victory “freed” states that had never claimed to provide equality for all, the song identifies slavery as the main issue over which the Civil War was fought. Undoubtedly, the corrido’s creator, Onofre Cárdenas, had heard from *tejano* Unionists about the leadership of Grant. Along the border, *mexicanos* and *tejanos* fought for and against the French intervention, but most favored troops allied with President Juárez. While alliances shifted throughout the wars, the Unionists established stronger links to the *juaristas*, while the Confederates allied with the French. Various troops repeatedly crossed the border to pursue their opponents and to seek refuge. Deserters traversed the river in both directions, and sometimes joined the corresponding nation’s armed conflict, especially if their unit leader switched alliances. Cross-border social ties shaped some decisions. Union deserters, for example, might join their families or friends in *juarista* units. As troops appropriated livestock and firewood, or imprisoned suspects for aiding their enemies, ranch owners and workers felt pressured from multiple sides. The border between the United States and Mexico failed to contain each nation’s internal conflict. Preoccupied with its own civil war, the American government was limited in its response to French intervention. The conclusion of the U.S. Civil War allowed the American government to offer more direct help to the government of Benito Juárez by allowing his agents to purchase weapons and ammunition, as well as to recruit volunteers in the United States. In addition to troops and supplies, ideas about nations, sovereignty, and freedom traversed the boundary to shape the views of local residents (Meyer 290-296). Ultimately, the song admonishes border residents to remember Grant’s role in defending liberty and the Constitution.

These corridos demonstrate that Mexicans along the border understood the issues that provoked the U.S. Civil War and Mexico’s war against French intervention. National conflicts in the United States and Mexico repeatedly influenced the popular culture of the border region. They also tellingly reveal just how comfortable border residents were with the multiple and ambiguous identities they assumed; not only did they express a political affinity with the United States, but Mexican Texans also felt connected to Mexico. Passed across multiple generations of *fronterizos* before being recorded, the corridos are local expressions of Mexican nationalism, American patriotism, and regional pride. Yet, locals’ self-perception as Mexican nationals, Americans, and *tejanos* all at the same time appeared unambiguous to them. Ultimately, the songs served as reminders of how the processes of state formation of both nations

influenced but did not completely shape the identities of Mexicans in South Texas' political and cultural borderland.

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