Revista de Ciencias Sociales

Transdisciplinar

Vol.1 Núm. 1 Julio-Diciembre 2021

UANL

CENTRO
ESTUDIOS
HUMANÍSTICOS

Transdisciplinar
Revista de Ciencias Sociales

Making the Southern Border American, and Mexico as well. A reading of Chatfield's Twin Cities of the Border

Haciendo que la frontera sur sea americana, y México también. Una lectura de Chatfield's Twin Cities of the Border

Arturo Zárate-Ruiz
El Colegio de la Frontera Norte
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6216-6653

Fecha entrega: 05-5-2021 **Fecha aceptación:** 13-7-2021

Editor: Beatriz Liliana De Ita Rubio. Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León, Centro de Estudios Humanísticos, Monterrey, Nuevo León, México.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.29105/transdisciplinar1.1-1

Email: azarate@colef.mx

Making the Southern Border American, and Mexico as well. A reading of Chatfield's Twin Cities of the Border

Haciendo que la frontera sur sea americana, y México también. Una lectura de Chatfield's Twin Cities of the Border

Arturo Zárate-Ruiz[1]
azarate@colef.mx

Abstract: Historical documents call attention not only because of the facts reported, but also because of the views held by the reporter concerning the matters referred. This essay aims at identifying W. H. Chatfield's views of America, Mexico, and their shared border, as they appear in his 1893 pamphlet *The Twin Cities, Brownsville, Texas, Matamoros, Mexico, of the Border, and the Country of the Lower Rio Grande*: that the Texan region bordering with Mexico then was fully Americanized, moreover, that the Mexican side of the border was undergoing a process of Americanization very needed for business, process which from that region would extend to all the Americas, process very convenient for American capitalists. The identification of those views is done, here, by highlighting them through a reading of the text itself, their judging being mostly left to the people reviewing what the author of this essay has stressed.

1 El Colegio de la Frontera Norte

Key words: US/Mexico Border, historical documents, textual analysis, Brownsville/Matamoros.

Resumen: Los documentos históricos llaman la atención no solo por los hechos reportados, sino también por las opiniones del reportero sobre los asuntos referidos. Este ensayo tiene como objetivo identificar las opiniones de W. H. Chatfield sobre Estados Unidos, México y su frontera compartida, como aparecen en su folleto de 1893 *The Twin Cities, Brownsville, Texas, Matamoros, Mexico, of the Border, and the Country of the Lower Rio Grande*: que la región texana limítrofe con México entonces estaba totalmente americanizada, además, que el lado mexicano de la frontera estaba atravesando un proceso de americanización muy necesario para los negocios, proceso que desde esa región se extendería a toda América, algo muy conveniente para los capitalistas estadounidenses. La identificación de esos puntos de vista se hace, aquí, resaltándolos a través de la lectura del texto mismo, reservando en gran medida su juicio a los lectores que revisen lo que el autor de este ensayo ha enfatizado.

Palabras clave: Frontera Estados Unidos/México, documentos históricos, análisis textual, Brownsville/Matamoros.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.29105/transdisciplinar1.1-1

Introduction

In 1893, W. H. Chatfield published, in New Orleans, a pamphlet titled *The Twin Cities, Brownsville, Texas, Matamoros, Mexico, of the Border, and the Country of the Lower Rio Grande*.[2] As it will be discussed, the tract aimed at offering information to entrepreneurs and possible well-to-do settlers about Brownsville, Texas, and Matamoros, Mexico, a binational region, he assured, for very profitable investment.

Among many arguments, Chatfield pointed out that the Texan region bordering with Mexico then was fully —or almost— Americanized. Moreover, he explained that the Mexican side of the border was undergoing a process of Americanization very needed for business, process which from that region would extend to all the Americas, something very convenient for American capitalists.

As it will be noticed here, Chatfield and his sources had their own views on what made something American and something Mexican, and a view that the Americans and the American way of life should prevail.

This essay's purpose is highlighting these views as they actually appear in Chatfield' tract itself. The author of this essay counts on that doing so is enough to figure out the beliefs and narrative found in Chatfield's pamphlet. The contemporary reader may judge them. If this essay's author offers some few comments,

2 From now on, the text quoted is Chatfield, W. H. (1893). *The Twin Cities, Brownsville, Texas, Matamoros, Mexico, of the Border, and the Country of the Lower Rio Grande*. New Orleans: E. P. Brandao. References are made by specifying the page and the column of the text, for example, (p. 4b), (p. 15c, d).

DOI: https://doi.org/10.29105/transdisciplinar1.1-1

he tries to do so barely to clear up a point that may deserve attention, and to fulfill the purpose of highlighting such views.

Features and purpose of Chatfield's pamphlet

The Twin Cities of the Border is a 52 page pamphlet (covers included) about Brownsville, Texas, Matamoros, Mexico, and the Country of the Lower Rio Grande. It resembles a tabloid in its layout. It includes maps, profiles of renown people and businessmen in the area, advertisings (mostly from the profiled persons), and many photos of the places and buildings described.

Concerning this tract's purpose, Chatfield said:

> [The pamphlet] will convey to the outside world a convincing proof of the fact that a grand opportunity for amassing wealth and providing lucrative employment for an immense number of people, has been lying dormant in this section since its territory was first annexed to the United States. (p. 1b)

This grand opportunity is particularly given to Yankees and outside capitalists:

> This section has much to offer for the mature consideration of that class of young men who are seeking for the right place in which to begin a life career, and who possess the capital to start in business for themselves. Such men, with a little capital, brawny arms, clear brains and "Yankee grit," are infusions which will benefit the section they honor by their adoption; and in whatever field the new-comers may elect to put forth their efforts, the most undoubted assurances of success are held out to them by the prolificness of Nature and the improvements to be wrought by the hand of man. (p. 3d)

DOI: https://doi.org/10.29105/transdisciplinar1.1-1

Some general arguments for embracing such an opportunity

An important part of Chatfield's arguments refer to Brownsville area for its optimal material conditions. Cameron County, where Brownsville was located, was larger than Delaware and Rhode Island states together, he said (p. 37a). Besides offering a detailed compendium of weather statistics (p. 6-7), Chatfield summarized his views on this region climate thus:

> Summer heat is tempered by cool breezes from the Gulf, which make the nights delightful, and are laden with moisture sufficient, to prevent a high range of temperature. The winters are so short and mild that is almost a misnomer to apply this term to the seasons.
>
> It is an ideal spot to enjoy "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" and secure the blessings of health, wealth and social distinction. (p. 37a)

Brownsville natural resources included hundreds of native species, so many that only a portion had been named (pp. 21b-22a), he asserted, some of these species apt for industrial ventures as it was the case of the mesquite tree (p. 44b, c). He noticed that the land originally was inhabited by large droves of wild horses and cattle, and that, by 1876, the annual exportation of cattle and wool was estimated at $3,870,000 (p. 2a). Quoting a report that would be published in the *Express*, Chatfield said:

> "The garden spot of Texas is situated near Brownsville along the Rio Grande river [...] There are great opportunities offered the industrious and practical farmer or fruit grower along the

> Rio Grande. Land can be purchased very cheaply and by irrigation as fine products can be raised as are grown anywhere in the United States. Grapes are now grown along the Lower Rio Grande and ripen a month earlier than those grown in the El Paso district." (p. 5 b, c).

"Nature has endowed this land with all things to assist man's endeavor", Chatfield assured: timber, pasture, stock raising, a great variety of fruits, sugar cane and beet, Indian corn, potatoes, sorghum, hemp, flax, beans, peas, peanuts, sweet potatoes, pumpkins, melons, a complete variety of garden vegetables, pecans, bee wax and honey, Sea Island cotton, tobacco, and more (pp. 37-38a, 39b-41b). Prices of land, he said, ranged from $1.50 to $3 per acre of pasture lands, and $5 to $10 per acre for the best farming land; county and State school lands could be bought for $2 or $3 an acre (p. 37b).

Besides the important amount of capital invested and value of imports and exports, Chatfield considered, there were a great variety of business and employments pursued in Brownsville, as he carefully listed them. He also noted that:

> [...] in 1889 the assessor's book showed the taxable valuation of property to be $840,000. It is now probably very nearly $1,000,000 and there is no doubt that it could be expanded to $10,000,000 within ten years. (p. 3d).

Chatfield took care of detailing Brownsville's municipal finances, disbursements, expenses, and revenue (p. 15d-16), and the contributions payed by each tax payer in the area, too (p. 25c-d). Attention to the poor was offered, he said, without requiring poor houses, and the few inmates in prison did not represent an

DOI: https://doi.org/10.29105/transdisciplinar1.1-1

important expense for the city, since there was comparatively very little crime in the area, and there was a well-paid police department that would preclude the idea that violators of the law would remain uncaught or unpunished (p. 16a).

Besides the police department, Chatfield amply depicted other Brownsville citizen services, organizations, and institutions, such as two organized fire voluntary companies (p. 26d-27a), a Post Office with a money order service (p. 18c-19c), excellent public and private schools (p 16b-17c), a very active Custom House (p. 24), several newspapers (p. 24d-25a), a United States Court (in Austin, Texas), a District Court , a County and a Probate Court, a Mayor Court (p. 25a-25c), a well-supplied, cheap, and clean City Market (25d-26c), and a company of organized militia (27b-28a).

Chatfield called attention to the quality of the urban planning (p. 2d) and the private and public buildings in this city. He described them carefully and included many pictures of them throughout his pamphlet, for example, the Catholic Cathedral (p. 5b-c), the City Market and Plaza (p. 11), the High School Building (p. 17b-c), the New Government Building (p. 19b-c), the Mayor's residence, Mr. Brooks's residence (p. 20b-c), the Post Hospital (p. 29b-c). "The Cathedral [...] stands like a wakeful sentinel guarding the city," he said, "the appearance of the structure is massive [...] which gives it an air of antiquity, in perfect keeping with the purity of its Gothic architecture" (p. 5d). He had enthusiastic words about public schools, too: "handsome brick buildings, neat furniture, spotless walls, good ventilation and abundant light" (p. 16d). And he did for the New Government Building, as well:

> Gas fittings are supplied throughout the building, and only await a Gas Company to fill them. In the meantime, one of the enterprising citizens has started an electric light plant, and hopes to furnish to the Government Building very soon [...]

> The hardware, such as door-knobs, locks, fronts, escutcheons, etc., is all of real bronze, of a heavy pattern, and entirely suitable to such a handsome structure [...]

> The gutters and drainage pipes are ample and thoroughly well fitted. Galvanized iron, moulded and ornamented, was used for gutters, hips, ridges, finials, cornices, copings, etc. (p. 20b)

Concerning the public buildings, he summed up that they "will compare favorably with those of any city of its size in the country, and are conveniently located and thoroughly adapted to their several uses (p. 3a)."

Chatfield praised Brownsville school education, too. "The discipline of schools is excellent, and displays a practical application of the Principal's military training", he said, "Brownsville is surely destined to become an educational center for a populous area, and she has taken a stride forward which places her institutions of learning upon an advanced position of excellence" (p. 17a-b).

Chatfield also commended Brownsville on the grounds of its governmental officials (for example, its Mayor Thomas Carson (p. 20c), Postmaster John W. Hoyt (p. 19a), Judge Emilio C. Forto (p. 27b), School Superintendent Cummings (p. 16c), Custom House Collector R. B. Rentfro (p. 24d)), scientists (for

DOI: https://doi.org/10.29105/transdisciplinar1.1-1

example, Mr. Armstrong (p. 22c)), military men and war veterans (for example, William Neale (pp. 12-15), William Kelly (p. 21a-b), Louis Cowen (p. 21d), Adolphus Glaevecke (p. 23)), journalists (for example, Mr. Maltby (pp. 23A, 25a) and Mr. Franklin (p. 25a)), and many businessmen and women, White American or European, and mostly from the American side of the border (for example, Mr. Woodhouse (p. 21b-c), Mr. Raphael (p. 21d), Mrs. Krausse (p. 22a), Mrs. Bollack (p. 22b), Mr. Putegnat (p. 23d)), although some of them with business offices in both sides of the border (for example, Mr. Cross (p. 21d-22a)). Several of these businessmen were land owners and urban developers awaiting for clients to sell them some property (for example, Mr. Field (p. 22a-b)).

The opportunity was there for newcomers, he noticed:

> The present conditions are most favorable for settlers, as they may now secure the advantages of cheap lands and economical living, and a certainty of transportation for their crops; for capitalists, because the urgent need of wealth to establish large industrial enterprises and construct public works, will enhance the value of property, and, consequently, the security of their investment. (p. 4a)

He summarized his own assessment of Brownsville opportunities thus:

> Brownsville has steadily improved, its population has increased, liberal ideas have spread, business has slowly but surely gained in volume, and its municipal affairs have been well and economically administered. (p. 3c).

Or using William Neale's words, as Chatfield quotes them, the solid base of Brownsville was "mercantile integrity, municipal economy and honesty, and obedience to the law" (p. 15a).

To all this, new developments would make Brownsville an even better place to invest, Chatfield argued, since the construction of railroads, irrigation for agriculture, and the introduction of truck farming were in course, and would surely magnify the profits of any venture (p. 3d-5c, 38b). Even, there were opportunities of making Point Isabel, in this section, a winter resort, he assured (p. 41b).

Brownsville, a city bordering with Mexico and Latin America

A particular Chatfield's argument supporting the opportunity of investing in Brownsville was its bordering with Matamoros, a twin city from another nation, Mexico. If compared with Brownsville, he said, it is the "stronger" of the border (p. 31a), perhaps because, "surrounded by a line of fortifications" (p. 33b), "Matamoros is a strongly fortified city", moreover, "the soldiers you see here are the flower of the Mexican army; neatly dressed, thoroughly equipped, and well set up", and, as he observed, its streets and sidewalks were well built, laid, and traced (p. 32b-32d).

The place was "romantic", he said, offering an opportunity of meeting with "dark-eyed senoritas" who, standing on ledges located between bars and window casings, add a "touch of Old World grace to the scene which is extremely captivating" (p. 32b-c). He also expressed:

 DOI: https://doi.org/10.29105/transdisciplinar1.1-1

> Viewed thus, in perspective, the scenes bring to mind the vivid pen pictures of Washington Irving descriptive of the modern surroundings of the Alhambra, and gather about one's senses a halo of romance in which he may revel for hours. (p. 32c).

Family bonds in Matamoros were also praised by Chatfield:

> Glimpses of happy domesticity are often caught, where strolling past these gratings in the summer twilight. Three, and sometimes four, generations will be seated around the enclosure, amid a bower of flowering plants and tropical foliage, engaged in animated conversations or listening to dulcet tones of a harp, as they are drawn by the fingers of one of the lovely daughters of the house [...] nothing can erase the pleasant memory of that stolen glance. (p. 32c).

Although the buildings were outwardly dull, sometimes the inside of them, where families lived, were not so, Chatfield noticed:

> In strolling about through the central portion of the city, the general character of the buildings is observed to be monotonously regular, and the long lines of close shutters lead you to suppose that the rooms behind them are vacant. A door suddenly opens, and as a well-to-do-looking gentleman turns to close it, you glance beyond him and perceive a handsome apartment, furnished in French style, with heavily gilded mirror-frames, gilt tables with marble tops and large glass cases of stuffed birds and artificial flowers standing upon them, a spotless floor dotted with fine rugs, an elegant French clock on the mantel-piece, and horsehair furniture with fantastically carved legs and feet. (p. 32d-33-a).

Chatfield celebrated Mexican cuisine, present in Brownsville market, too, and attracting the Americans for its taste, particularly the "dulce" made from "piloncillo", with fantastic shapes (p. 30c), and the "tamale":

> The "tamale" is an article of diet among the Mexicans, although there are many Americans who relish them fully as much as do the natives [...]
>
> Americans select the vendor who sells the smallest and hottest "tamales" [...] and buy them from her by the dozen [...] Then they hasten home, occasionally shifting the steaming hot "brown paper parcel" from one hand to the other, and share them with friends. When the corn shock in which the "tamales" are steamed is removed, a roll of corn meal is disclosed and it is eaten like a banana; there is a streak of finely minced chicken or beef in the center, highly season with red pepper, of course; but they should be eaten hot. (p. 30c).

It was Matamoros City the one enjoying an Opera House, he reported:

> The interior arrangement is somewhat on the order of the Coliseum at Rome [...]
>
> [...] on New Year's Eve [...] it was only necessary to watch at the magnificent chandeliers suspended from the well-ventilated and lofty ceiling, and thence to the hundreds of beautiful women attired with resplendent costumes and adorned with costliest jewels, to make one forget that outer darkness existed in the Teatro Reforma—or anywhere else [...]

DOI: https://doi.org/10.29105/transdisciplinar1.1-1

> The stage is very large and has every appurtenance for the setting of elaborate scenes. (p. 32d)

In Matamoros, Americans also found "amusement", he said, as when the Fort Brown garrison and their ladies enjoyed the "Oriental-looking shops" where "fine linen, laces", pots, silver, opals, "gorgeously painted Guadalajara jars, and a host of articles in Mexican 'drawn work'" were sold (p. 29d). Quoting a journalist, the "Rambler", Chatfield pointed out that the market was well supplied with meat, fish, a great variety of vegetables, many of them with names unknown by him, and supplied with curiosities, such as native toys, jugs, pitchers, many made of Terra Cotta pottery, excellent for water-coolers (p. 33a).

He also considered:

> We frequently attend a "baile" (ball) or a concert, at the Opera House, where we meet the elite of Matamoros, and have a pleasant opportunity afforded us to observe their manners and customs. The "baile ground" at Santa Cruz is a public pleasure resort for the lower classes and is well worth a visit. Sunday is the gala day, when the grand bailes take place, drawing crowds from both cities. (p. 29d)

If needed, a relationship of assistance between the twin cities existed, as Chatfield cited William Neale's narrative of the history of Brownsville, for example, when Mexican troops, in 1859, defended the American city from a "200 ruffians" attack (p. 15b), and when, in 1863, Matamoros served as a refuge for Americans fleeing from a fire that destroyed Brownsville (p. 15c).

A most important issue, for Chatfield, was that Brownsville's and Matamoros's commercial affairs were thoroughly identified (p. 32a). To make it clear, he quoted the "Rambler":

> The intercourse between "The Twin Cities of the Border" is so constant and familiar, that it is difficult to realize they are dependences of separate republics; to the stranger they present no more marked contrast than New York and Brooklyn, or any two cities of the United States having similar autonomy. (p. 33a)

Public transportation already existed in Matamoros, Chatfield continued citing the "Rambler"; moreover, this transportation could connect this twin city with Brownsville, and be extended through Brownsville:

> A street car line belts the central portion of Matamoros, the schedule being so arranged that cars leave the city and the terminal at Santa Cruz, simultaneously, every half hour [...]

> A plan was once proposed for carrying this system of street cars across the river on ferryboats, and belting Brownsville, also. The matter was carried to such a point that the necessary capital had been secured, and work was about to begin on the American side, when some sudden change of plans occurred and the work was indefinitely postponed. There is but little doubt of it being taken up again at not distant day, and carried to completion, as the interests of the Twin Cities will eventually demand such a means of rapid transit. (p. 33a-b)

But the key element concerning the twin cities' commercial affairs and future development was not reduced to local transportation and an economic exchange between just the one

DOI: https://doi.org/10.29105/transdisciplinar1.1-1

and the other, but they being the route of an economic exchange between the whole Americas, he said: "Brownsville [...] is squarely located on the shortest route to the City of Mexico, and thus will become of great importance as an intermediate station on the great Pan-American Railway, which will cross the Rio Grande at this point" (p. 4a). To make this clearer, Chatfield quotes T. C. Crawford:

> It would not be enough to have treaties admitting our articles of product under specially favorable conditions. But it was highly important to have such means of communication as would enable to trade, once established, to be swiftly and economically carried. To this end, it was deem necessary to encourage the establishment of steamship lines, and [...] to connect the United States with the South with a Pan-American railroad. This road was to traverse the entire length of the South American Continent like a backbone, with branches radiating to the commercial capitals. (p. 4c).

Chatfield quoted William Eleroy Curtis, a representative of the State Department, writing:

> Whoever builds this road will hold the key to the heart of the Southern continent [...] the greatest expectations are based upon the opening of the markets of Mexico, Central, and South America, and the West Indies to our manufactures articles. The annual imports of fifty millions of people that comprise the countries and the colonies south of the Gulf of Mexico and the Rio Grande average $600,000,000, and the greater part of this total is represented by manufactured articles. (p. 4b)

Being Brownsville and Matamoros at the crossroad of this future railroad led Chatfield to reach this conclusion:

> The merchants, farmers and manufacturers of the United States who shall have located at Brownsville or its vicinity, and reaped the advantages of being early in the field, will assuredly be in a position to introduce their goods and products into the markets of Mexico, Central and South America, at figures with which it will be difficult for most distant centres to compete. In the meantime there would exist the certainty of a home market, excellent facilities for exports to the countries of the Eastern Hemisphere either by the Atlantic or the Pacific route, and a business so firmly established that any desirable expansion to meet the demands of new trade, could be readily effected. (p. 4c).

How the Twin Cities became such a great investment opportunity

Chatfield made it clear that the optimal conditions of the twin cities for investment were not always present, since, before reaching these conditions, this Southern section of the border of the United States should become fully American.

For that purpose, he reviewed the history of Mexico and of Rio Grande Valley section.

Concerning Mexico, he said that before the Spaniards arrived, the Aztecs inhabited the place, a people who possibly were of a Caucasian race because of their remarkable achievements; once the Spaniards arrived, they dominated the Indians for 300 years, "took care to suppress all enterprises that could in any way conflict with Spanish trade and manufactures; appropriated all products of the mines which could be obtained by the rude workings in vogue; sequestrated immense tracts of land for the church, and retained the most powerful influences of priest-

DOI: https://doi.org/10.29105/transdisciplinar1.1-1

craft and the ignorance of the masses" (p. 31a-b); once Mexico achieved independence, this country suffered, using William Neale's words, "a chronic disease" [...] I mean Revolution, or what they call *Pronunciamientos*" (p. 14d), and, according to Chatfield himself, "three hundred revolutions and various wars" (p. 31d), revolutions which, once Brownsville existed, were an opportunity of business by supplying arms to revolutionaries in Mexico. Citing William Neale, Chatfield referred that one of Brownsville's fires, almost destroying the city, was caused by the explosion of a munition store next to Stillman's brick building (pp. 14d, 23c). Chatfield noticed that, at the time he was writing, revolutions and promiscuous executions were things of the past, in Matamoros, and that new opportunities of business between the twin cities were at hand, since their commercial affairs finally were thoroughly identified (p. 32a).

Concerning Brownsville, Chatfield said, the portion of land where it was situated "was described as a 'desert,' inhabited only by 'large droves of wild horses and cattle' and unexplored unless by 'mustang hunters,' who made it their hunting ground for years." Nonetheless, he acknowledged that "The wild horses and the cattle were remnants of the vast herds that formerly swarmed over these rich pasture lands and constituted the wealth of the Mexican owners" (p. 2a). Moreover, he noticed, they "were driven from this paradise by the breaking out of the war in Texas," their "three millions of heads of stock [...] abandoned or destroyed", and most of the inhabitants withdrawn "to the south of the river" during the progress of the Texan revolution (p. 2a). Furthermore, during the Mexican War, American ruffians congre-

gated in "this frontier", but they finally left to California because of the Gold Rush, and the few who remained in the area "killed off one another" (p. 14b-c). Once the north of the river was "annexed to the United States" (p. 1b), Chatfield believed, Mexicans returned from the south and "re-established their stock ranches," the State legislation "assuring them the undisputed possession of their lands," and as the Americans began to settle in this section, too, they purchased "land from the Mexicans" or located "public domain under the laws of Texas" (p. 2a). Confirming "the titles of land in the newly acquired territory", he said, led to the development of this section "unbounded resources" (p. 1c).

Apparently, there were other ways of assuring tracts of land in this section. Citing William Neale, Chatfield referred to Colonel Kinney, a Texan revolutionist, claiming "everything he saw as his property by right of discovery and might of recovery" (p. 12d). He also referred Kinney's recommendation to Neale: "to mount a horse, ride around as a big piece of land as he could encompass in one day, and the land within the lines he rode over should be his—Mr. Neale's" (p. 12d). However, Chatfield said following Neale's narrative, "some unscrupulous men got a footing among us; they made vast claims of landed property and instituted suits at law; they in fact claimed all land donated to the city by the State Legislature, that lay within the corporate limits" (p. 14c). According to this narrative, one of these men was Juan N. Cortina, who "issued titles to whoever he pleased, and thus exhausted the last source of security of property," titles "of no validity whatever, [...] usurped by the might of terror" (p. 13c). An important portion of Chatfield's pamphlet was devoted to

 DOI: https://doi.org/10.29105/transdisciplinar1.1-1

make it clear that Cortina was a "fugitive of justice," [...] "ignorant and uneducated," [...] "a horse thief, a vagabond" , a leader of the ruffians and banditti, "cattle thieves, murderers and robbers" who captured the city of Brownsville in 1859 and liberated the prisoners in jail (p. 2a-c, 15a-b, 23c-d), "a thing till now unheard of in these United States" (p. 2b). Thus, this pamphlet offered an account of Cortina's "reign of terror" which "lasted for ten years, [...] filled with wanton destruction of human life, wholesale appropriation of cattle and other movable property; robberies, assaults and organized attacks upon towns, custom-houses and detached ranches, as to make one shudder to read it" (p. 2c).

As referred in this pamphlet, Cortina even dared to help Mexicans participate in Cameron county sheriff election, contrary to what was previously agreed in caucus, and thus defeating who was formerly the chosen candidate (pp. 14c, 15a). Neale's Oration celebrating the centennial of American Revolution, in Brownsville, as quoted by Chatfield, was mostly devoted to depict Cortina's wickedness (p. 14-15). According to Major Heintzelman's report cited by Chatfield, Cortina "was the champion of his race—the man who would right the wrongs of the Mexicans and drive back the hated Americans to the Nueces" (p. 2c). Threats against Brownsville continued, Chatfield said (following Neale's report), since in 1851 American filibusters attacked Matamoros to make this Mexican city a Zona Libre (a duty free point), something very contrary to Brownsville's commercial interests: business subsequently "wane rapidly" in the American city (p. 14d, 33b-d). In any case, "border troubles" ceased, Chatfield assured, once a treaty was signed between the United States and

Mexico, "stipulating that the troops of either country should be empowered to pursue marauders into the territory of the other" (p. 2d). However, by the time Chatfield published his tract, there still were unsolved disputes concerning property. As Chatfield himself reported, the American government had not paid for forty leagues then occupied by Fort Brown, land confiscated by the Army that belonged to De la Garza family since 1781 (p. 20c-d, 28a-b).

At any rate, there was a time of prosperity in the region after Cortina's reign of terror ceased, Chatfield explained:

> During the War of the Rebellion, [...] the Rio Grande was left free and the Confederacy utilized it in exporting immense quantities of cotton and other accumulated products of the South, and in importing munitions of war and the food staples it was impossible to produce in the disorganized state of labor. Vast amounts of merchandise were store in the warehouses of Brownsville and Matamoros, and the mutual interests then awakened were strengthened by friendly intercourse, as these cities became in fact as well as in name, "The Twin Cities of the Border". Strangers thronged the streets, intent upon the purchase of supplies for filling army contracts or buying goods to replenish their empty shelves. There was money in the Confederacy in those days, and was freely spent in arming and equipping with the best the world afforded, those new-fledged defenders who afterward as proudly wore the tattered gray; and procuring the finery of noble woman who, a few months later, tore the most costly fabrics into shreds for the comfort of their suffering kindred at the front. The inland routes were covered with wagon-trains and travellers were constantly passing the States and this thriving mart of commerce. Business of all kinds was revived; wealth flowed into the merchant co-

DOI: https://doi.org/10.29105/transdisciplinar1.1-1

> ffers, and many large fortunes were made on both sides of the Rio Grande. Employment was provided for the whole population, and all—from the heads of large commercial houses to the messenger boys and the water carriers—found it exceedingly remunerative. (p. 2d).

Following mostly Neale's narrative, Chatfield reported that Federal troops reached Brownsville in 1863, confiscating many Confederates' properties, and making many secessionist, like William Neale, flee to Matamoros; that the Federal troops welcome the ruffian Cortina in 1863 and 1864; that, in such a year, Confederates were back in Fort Brown; that in 1865 the last Civil War battle was fought and won by colored troops in Brownsville; that Confederates could return to Brownsville in that year, recover their properties, and, since then, live "in peace and quietude" [...] "enjoying the high esteem and confidence of four generations" who surrounded them "with well merited honors" (p. 13d), often being them the mercantile (p. 20c-22b), social (p. 20a), governing (p. 20c), and public opinion elite (p. 24d-25a) in Brownsville, who, members of the old Democratic party, cared about the city demands of land property (p. 14c-d). Chatfield also reported that the people who once reached Brownsville as "carpetbaggers" finally became well established people in the city (p. 13d).

Segregation was enforced, he noticed, since colored people had their own schools, albeit their teacher was white (p. 17b), and, something "refreshing to witness", the bootblack, despite crippled, was white, too (p. 30d). In any case, Chatfield assured, colored people, even when they were runaway slaves [emancipated] in Mexico, and welcome as middle class people there (p.

28c), once recaptured by slave hunters like William Neale, preferred to return to the United States to their "Old Cabin Home", since that was better than staying Mexico (p. 12d).

By the time Chatfield published his pamphlet, a railway would penetrate this region and would develop Brownsville's unbounded resources, he said (p. 1c). And despite that Chatfield reported Catarino Garza's undergoing revolution in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, he made it clear that this man was not a threat to the peace of the American side of this section (p. 43c-d).

Some difficulties concerning the task of Americanizing the border and beyond

Having in mind the task of Americanizing the border and beyond for successful investment (pp. 16d, 35d), Chatfield identified some difficulties still unsolved. Half or even a third of the population in Brownsville was Mexican, he said, and this population neither spoke or understood the English language (pp. 3a, 16d); moreover, "Englishmen, Frenchmen, Americans, Irishmen, and Africans [...] nearly all use the Spanish language or its Mexican 'patois,' in the affairs of daily life" in both sides of the border (p. 33b); this fact required from the City of Brownsville that, with the exception of the marshal, its police forces were of Mexican descent, with the requirement of speaking English to aid the stranger who did not speak Spanish (p. 26c-d). But English language should be learned, and for that purpose, Chatfield applauded, several methods for teaching it were successfully applied in Brownsville schools (pp. 16b-18c), and several festivals were celebrated using this language, he approved, such as All Saint's Day and Columbus Day (p. 30a-b), no so with "The Pastores", a

 DOI: https://doi.org/10.29105/transdisciplinar1.1-1

festival which was of terrible taste, he lamented, because of the use of Spanish (p. 30b-c):

> [...] an object of interest for strangers at first, [...] it is totally un-American [...] The participants are all Mexicans, and not very good actors as a rule. They act as wooden figures, and recite so rapidly that even good Spanish scholars cannot understand half they say. (p. 30c)

Social entertainments often took place in Brownsville, such as dances, Chatfield informed (p. 27d), but Mexican "bailes" were rightly banned within the city limits, Chatfield observed, to prevent the native population disorderly behavior (p. 26d), notwithstanding that such "bailes" were frequented and a source of amusement for many American boys and girls in the Mexican side of the border, even at the lower classes' "baile ground" at Santa Cruz (p. 29d).

On the one hand, as already noticed, big fires almost destroyed the whole of Brownsville for three times, mostly because of the explosion of stores that sold ammunitions to Mexican revolutionists (pp. 14d, 23c). On the other hand, "jacales" were the buildings immediately demolished, although affected by, Chatfield acknowledged, not common fires (pp. 26d-27a). Any case, Chatfield celebrated the replacement of these dwellings of the Mexican population for new buildings "attesting the financial prosperity and refined taste of the owners" (p. 2d), and he expected that this new building style, introduced in Matamoros, would even replace the monotonous Mexican style of South of the Border residences (pp. 32d-33a).

As noticed above, Chatfield quoted William Eleroy Curtis, a representative of the State Department, to stress the opportunities for American capitalists of doing business not also at the border, but in Mexico and South America, too. This official also said:

> Latin American people never have been and never will be engaged extensively in mechanical pursuits. Their taste does not run that way. They will always continue to cultivate sugar, coffee, and other tropical product to which their climate and soil are favorable. They must continue to buy their bread, their wearing apparel, their household utensils and equipments, their railway supplies, their machinery and implements, and any other form of manufacture goods; and the factories of the United States can furnish these goods as well as the factories of Europe. American goods are popular everywhere, so popular that European factories forge our trademarks and infringe our patents. Very great advantages have been gained for a great variety of our goods by reciprocity treaties; but our increase of our exports must depend upon the enterprise of our merchants in introducing their goods into those markets. The government has open the way; but the merchants must adopt the same energy and patience that has caused the marvelous development of our in our internal commerce (p. 4b).

For the purpose of facilitating that American investors successfully do business in Mexico and beyond, it was important not only the Americanizing of the border, but of the whole Americas, too (pp. 3d-4, 16d, 35d-36b), Chatfield said, which implied not only the teaching of English language, but an educational system, values, and religion in accordance with American interests. To make it clear, Chatfield quoted Consul Richardson, in Matamoros:

DOI: https://doi.org/10.29105/transdisciplinar1.1-1

> It is hoped and believed that Mexico, and, indeed, the whole of Spanish America is on the threshold of new national, commercial and social life […] the question [is] changing the stream of Mexican life at the fountain—changing her ideals, her prepossessions, her prejudices. In the one matter of education, Mexico is induced to look Northward. Here is our opportunity. If Mexico could be peppered with American schools, we might expect to find the next generation more American in its civilization than at present. (p. 36b)

Concerning the "peppering" of Mexico, Chatfield celebrated the American schools that promoted the learning of English, the teaching of lessons in English, and the use of English textbooks there (p. 36b).

He also celebrated Consul Richardson opinions on changing religion in Mexico. On the one hand, the Consul approved that "the church no longer has any supervision, and her interference, even to the slightest degree, would not be tolerated". On the other hand, the Consul considered, "the year of 1891 presents to free Protestant America the fact of absolutely free education, untainted by sacerdotalism in 'poor priest-ridden Mexico,' thus, "Protestantism sees its opportunity and has not been slow to avail itself of it, and so the foundation of a splendid system of schools, free and private, has been laid" (p. 35b-c). As quoted by Chatfield, the Consul also said:

> The friends of the United States in Mexico to-day are not the Americans residing here, but the Mexicans who have been educated in American colleges and universities, or in the private and mission schools maintained by American enterprise and

> philanthropy. The work done here is fundamental [...] I feel increasingly certain that Mexican trade will be ours only when Mexican people are ours. (pp. 36b, 35d)

Although Chatfield to some degree lamented that the old chapel (the only beautiful Church in Matamoros) was already destroyed because of Juarez banishing of religious orders, he saw it as a "landmark of the rise and fall of Catholic domination in Mexico" (p. 34d).

However, the effort of Americanizing the South might not be successful, if considering some of Chatfield's and his informants' observations, for example, Matamoros's post office was not good whereas Brownsville's was excellent (pp. 18c-19c; 36d); Mexicans could not ride four horse coaches as Neale did (p. 13a); Mexican and Spanish houses were ill-ventilated, poorly lighted, and not too well furnished (p. 16b, 33a); Mexican carts (p. 12c), houses (p. 32b), street light, bedroom furniture (p. 32c), toys, ornaments, silver filigree (p. 31), shops (p. 33a), and cooking utensils (pp. 26b, 26d, 31c, 33a) were ancient, primitive, and underdeveloped; if any good quality furniture was found in Matamoros, it was bought and made in America (p. 32c); before 1852, there was no butter at all, and, at any rate, the people's diet was reduced to beans, pepper, and a bit of meat (p. 26b);[3] if there were buildings in Matamoros which deserved praise, they were either American or made by Americans —the old chapel was constructed by a resident in Point Isabel (p. 34c-d), the American Consulate was the

3 This diet may remind Americans that chili now is the official dish of the state of Texas.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.29105/transdisciplinar1.1-1

best furnished place (p. 34a-c), the Opera House was designed by Architect Peeler (p. 32d), and the Main Plaza, by a General Taylor's officer (p: 31d): before the Mexican War, this plaza was no more than a pond "shared by ducks, goats, naked children and bull frogs" (p. 12d)—; although Chatfield liked Matamoros people "domesticity" (p. 32d), he would prefer that they were not so attached to their place of birth because men then were not ready to work far away from their families, as required by the construction of railroads (p. 31b); people of Matamoros would make deals, get along, and be fooled by Cherokees, something that Texans would never do (p. 1d, 12c). Seemingly, Chatfield did not rely on Mexicans either, since if he gathered information for his pamphlet openly in Brownsville, he did not do so in Matamoros, but worked as a "detective" did, using "his faculties of observation to such an extent that he can see and note many things in a short space of time" (p. 33a).

According to Chatfield's informant Neale, "mechanics were of all nationalities, except Mexicans", and "natives who belonged in the town held fandangoes in the streets and imbibed *pulque* or *mezcal*" (p. 12d), not as [Confederate] Gen. Bee and staff did, who drank "abundance of champagne" (p. 15c). Chatfield himself said that "political economy is a science yet to be taught among these degenerate remnants of a noble race, and any attempt to teach it would be a thankless task, if not a work of supererogation" (p. 31b). Although he reported that students at a school unmasked an American "pretended professor of mathematics" (p. 17d), he also reported Consul Richardson saying that "the Mexican mind is not mathematical; it does not like

close consecutive thinking [and the] effect of climate is such as to make the best result unattainable" (p. 35d). Thus, Chatfield considered that "The 'burro' and his native driver may have 'been made for each other'" (p. 30c).

The hope of teaching English in order to Americanize the border was even doubtful in Brownsville, let alone in Matamoros and the whole of Mexico, as said in the pamphlet:

> The foreign element is perceptible in everything about us. The population of Brownsville is about 7,000, one half of whom are Mexicans, and their habits and customs preponderate those of the Americans to a great extent [...] It becomes necessary for us to learn something of the Mexican language, for the lower classes adhere to it with an obstinate persistence which may be laudable in the abstract, as evincing a love of their native land, but it is scarcely to be commended when it is considered that they are inhabitants of an American town, and are under the protection of the laws of the United States. This trait is probably due to the Indian blood in their veins; for an Indian will resort to every expedient before he admit that he understands or can speak English. I once saw a curious instance of this at a Sioux Agency on the Missouri.
>
> Our camp have been beset with begging red skins of every age and sex, for several days, and our arms were tired with our effort to explain in the "sign language," that the rations of two companies would not admit of maintaining a soup kitchen for 7,000 Indians; so we took refuge in a statuesque repose. This puzzled the genuine beggars, and they ceased their importunities. We discovered a few bucks who wished to barter and exchange, but we refuse to understand, until finally, in sheer desperation, one of them seized a paper and a pencil from the table in the tent, and wrote these words in plain English —"coffee, sugar, flour"—

DOI: https://doi.org/10.29105/transdisciplinar1.1-1

> making signs that he would pay for them in skins. He would not speak a word in English in reply to our questions, but we soon learned that he had been educated at the Agency School.

> The Mexican street vendors [...] will parley for an hour in their patois before they will attempt to explain their meaning in English, of which language they at last evince a slight knowledge, rather than lose a chance of selling something. This happens only when you enter into negotiations with them, however; if you shake your head, they will pass on without a word. (p. 29c)

Besides, Chatfield assured, no Mexican would tolerate anything on his feet unless the shoes were finished with sharp pointed toes and high tapering heels: "Both Mexican men and women have small feet, and the style of foot wear which they most affect makes their feet look even smaller than they are" (p. 36d).

It might not be surprising that, being such his belief, Chatfield would not rely on the original settlers to trigger the border prosperity, but rather rely on new and American settlers to do so:

> The attention of agriculturist, capitalists, manufacturers, stock-raisers and tradesmen, throughout the United States, is invited to the unparalleled advantages which will accrue to them by casting in their lot with Brownsville. They are one and all requested to give this subject careful attention, and, if possible, to reassure themselves by personal inspection, before determining the momentous questions of where to locate their business, or in what section to place their investments.

> The citizens of Brownsville will become willing "hostages" for all who may seek "fortune" within their gates. (p. 5b)

Following Chatfield reasoning, Brownsville would be the launching platform to make fortune in the South, as some Americans in Brownsville were already doing, for example, Mr. Carson, the City Major, and Mr. Kelly were owners of silver and lead mines in Mexico (p. 20c, 21a), and Mr. Carson's interest was in immense fisheries in the coast of Tampico, too (p. 20c).

One final remark

Although this essay does not include every word of Chatfield's tract, it captures the essence of the pamphlet by highlighting some of its most important features.

References

Chatfield, W. H. (1893). *The Twin Cities, Brownsville, Texas, Matamoros, Mexico, of the Border, and the Country of the Lower Rio Grande.* New Orleans: E. P. Brandao.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.29105/transdisciplinar1.1-1