BORDER WARS, INTRIGUES, AND BANDIT RAIDS, 1915-1917

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July 25, 2020
THANKS!

- Office of the Vice President of Academic Affairs, WNMU and WNMU Faculty Development Funds
- Museum of Silver City
- Museum of South Texas History
- Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico
- New Mexico State Records Center and Archives
- University of Texas Special Collections and Nettie Lee Benson Collection
- Texas State Archives
“THE SILENT VOTE”

Luther Daniels Bradley, “The Silent Vote,” November 4th 1916. Library of Congress, LC-DIG-acd-2a06974. In this image, Lady Liberty reflects on the U.S. dead as a result of the Mexican Revolution, while overlooking Columbus and the two major sites of conflict for the Pershing Expedition. The title is likely a reference to the impact of these deaths on Wilson’s bid for re-election in November 1916.
MEXICAN SERVICE MEDALS
THE BACKGROUND

• “The population in the Valley was swelling [due to those] coming down to take advantage of the possibilities...We also had an influx from Mexico at the time due to the revolution...Many people assume that people came to the Valley to work. I saw no evidence of this other than maybe land salesmen. These were con men coming to a bonanza.” Oral History of E.H. Nordemeyer, Herb Nordemeyer Collection. Museum of South Texas.

• Antonio Rodríguez, a migrant from Mexico, was accused in November 1910 of murdering an Anglo-American woman near Rocksprings, Texas; after a few days, a mob kidnapped him from prison and burned him at the stake; the Mexican government began its own inquiry, but was unable to complete its investigation due to the unfolding revolution in that nation; Rodríguez’s murder was a sign that “Jaime” Crow practices and laws were working their way into South Texas along with increased migration.

• Raiding earlier in the decade centered primarily on cattle rustling and horse thievery.

• Clemente Vergara lost 11 horses that had been grazing on a disputed island in the Rio Grande; he entered Mexico to discuss the theft of his horses on February 13, 1914 and was subsequently beaten to death; Governor Oscar B. Colquitt considered sending the Texas Rangers to recover his body, but ultimately they were able to do so without crossing the international boundary. As the potential for border violence increased, Colquitt authorized an increase of the ranks of the Rangers to 75; his successor authorized a further increase of nearly double that amount.
THE MEXICAN REVOLUTION

- U.S. policy had been decidedly contradictory
- U.S. influence included the degree to which various combatants could buy weapons from U.S. manufacturers or use U.S. territory to plan and organize
- Francisco Madero led the overthrow of Porfirio Díaz, who entered exile in May 1911
- A few years later, U.S. Ambassador Henry Lane Wilson encouraged Victoriano Huerta’s golpe against Francisco Madero (in the closing months of the Taft Administration)
- Woodrow Wilson saw Huerta as anti-democratic and intervened at Veracruz in order to stop German weapons shipments
- Even after Huerta was gone, Wilson and his administration moved back and forth between Villa and Carranza
VENUSTIANO CARRANZA
• After Huerta went into exile in July 1914, Villa, Zapata, Carranza, and Obregón remained as the most viable contenders to lead Mexico

• Carranza and Obregón allied against Villa and Zapata

• Wilson, in early 1915: “It is none of my business, and it is none of your business how long [the Mexican people] take in determining [their government.] It is none of my business and it is none of your business how they go about the business.”

• At the Battles of Celaya and León, Obregón won a series of major victories against Villa’s forces

• Wilson began to hope that Villa would concede defeat, though one of his cabinet proposed that the US should buy beef from Villa as a form of support

• In this context, Carranza sought to force recognition from Wilson and cement his place as Mexico’s leader
TH E PLAN DE SAN DIEGO

• Carranza took advantage of a revolutionary manifesto and had it disseminated via former Huertistas who were imprisoned.

• Ostensibly promulgated in San Diego, Texas, in January 1915, the plan was an irredentist plot that called for a general revolt in the U.S. Southwest beginning on February 20th and the restoration of the Southwest to Mexico. The original plan called for the execution of all Anglo-American males above the age of 16 and the creation of states in the newly reacquired territory for Apaches and African Americans as well. Carranza warned American officials of the Plan and its intent.

• Initially the Plan wasn’t taken seriously; Basilio Ramos, who was arrested with a copy of the Plan in his possession, was released from prison in May 1915 and believed to have mental health issues.
• The Plan de San Diego evolved into the perfect scheme for Carranza, as it offered him the means to exert pressure on the U.S.; Carranza subsequently encouraged bandit raiders (sediciosos) to raid outlying ranches and destroy telegraph poles and rail lines beginning in the summer of 1915. Despite calls for a race war, raids and violence targeted Mexican-American ranchers and farm workers as well as Anglo-Americans.

• Carranza committed relatively few forces of his own—garrisons along the border provided some covering fire when sediciosos were outgunned and needed to retreat into Mexico; occasionally, small numbers of Mexican regulars accompanied sediciosos on raids. The principle sedicioso leaders were Luis de la Rosa and Aniceto Pizaña. There was an element of personal conflict at work here as well, as Pizaña owned Los Tulitos ranch and had resisted encroachment by his neighbors for several years.

• The cost was paid by Hispanics in South Texas. Faced with raids and fears of a racial “war without quarter,” the Texas Rangers and local law enforcement murdered of Tejanos with no regard for whether or not they were guilty or even sympathetic to the sediciosos.
Though Funston’s application to West Point had been rejected, he served capably in the Spanish-American War and became a household name after capturing General Emilio Aguinaldo in the Philippine-American War. Funston served as the military governor of Veracruz during the U.S. occupation and was subsequently entrusted with U.S. Southern Command. Had he not died of a massive heart attack in the St. Anthony Hotel in February 1917, Wilson would have placed him in command of the American Expeditionary Forces to Europe.
JAMES E. FERGUSON

• General Frederick Funston had been placed in charge of U.S. Southern Command; Funston moved thousands of U.S. troops to South Texas to discourage sedicioso raids

• As the scope of violence increased, Texas governor James E. Ferguson informed the leadership of the Texas Rangers that he would issue pardons for any actions they took to restore order; the Rangers were rapidly expanded from seventy-three to nearly 150

• Overall, Funston demonstrated remarkable restraint in ordering U.S. forces not to fire unless fired upon, and in deploying U.S. troops in small units in order to defend potential targets. Funston made every effort to adhere to Posse Comitatus restrictions in trying to distinguish between U.S. citizens and raiders who had crossed the international boundary.

• The Texas Rangers were generally not present at battles with sediciosos, but generally arrived after the fact for publicity purposes. Rangers were clearly documented as responsible for numerous summary executions
• From summer 1915 to summer 1916, there were a total of 21 U.S. civilian and military deaths in South Texas; Funston estimated that at least 300 Mexicans or Mexican Americans had been summarily executed; the number was most certainly higher, as families routinely found human remains in isolated areas for years to come. Hearings conducted by the Texas Legislature in 1919 place the figure as high as several thousand.

• This was not an issue with the “fog of war,” but a matter of intent; D.P. Gay of the U.S. Immigration Service had been present at the Norias raid, one of the largest open battles with sediciosos; Gay joined 8 soldiers and several workers in defending the King Ranch against an estimated 80 raiders
• Speaking specifically of Lauro Cavazos, a cowboy at the ranch who had joined the defenders, Gay noted that “I hope that I have not left the impression that I am prejudiced against the Mexican people...They, as well as we, have their good and bad...Some people have the idea that Mexicans are treacherous. I have not found them, as a class, to be, although on the other hand, they are grateful and full of gratitude, and are not cowards.”

• Gay reserved special contempt for those who in subsequent years claimed to have fought at Norias
Las Norias was the headquarters of the southernmost portion of the King Ranch. The *sediciosos* fled across the Rio Grande into Mexico after being repulsed by ranch defenders. “Las Norias Bandit Raid: Texas Rangers with dead bandits.” Dead bandits lassoed by Texas Rangers after the Norias raid. This photo is especially remarkable as Texas Rangers in the vicinity were actually out on patrol and did not participate in the defense of the Norias ranch. Treatment of the dead such as that conveyed in this image did provide additional fodder for *sediciosos* attempting to recruit additional insurrectionists in south Texas. Courtesy of Margaret H. McAllen Memorial Archives, Museum of South Texas History. U.S. Consul, Piedras Negras, to the Secretary of State. August 28, 1915. 812.00/16011 in the Internal Affairs of Mexico.
FAMILY VISITS THE OLMITO TRAIN WRECK

Image Two: This image captures one of the several families to visit the site of the train derailed at Olmito. Courtesy of Margaret H. McAllen Memorial Archives, Museum of South Texas History.
Carranza’s efforts to convince Wilson that he was acting to limit bandit raids and punish “ineffective” army officers proved effective. Even with violence continuing, by late October 1915, Wilson signaled that his administration would grant de facto recognition to Carranza’s government.

This concession enabled Carranza to begin to eliminate Villa as an opponent. First, the U.S. ended arms sales to Villa’s forces; second, Constitutionalist forces received permission to travel through the U.S. via rail from Eagle Pass, Texas to Arizona. From there, they were able to cross the border into Sonora and reinforce carrancista forces at Agua Prieta. After this loss, Villa’s was no longer a viable contender for national power in Mexico.

Villa was precisely the wrong person to cross in this manner. The raid on Columbus enabled Villa to retaliate against the U.S. while simultaneously weakening Carranza.
COLUMBUS, NM

Image Six: Soldier of the 13th Cavalry stands amidst burned and looted buildings and Columbus. Deming Headlight, February 20th, 2016
• The Pershing Expedition had to contend with both Villista forces and elements of the Constitutionalist Army

• Simultaneously, Carranza also renewed border raids in Texas tied to the Plan de San Diego

• Raids in Texas led to overt clashes between U.S. and Mexican forces, taking both nations to the brink of war. Sediciosos began to explicitly target U.S. Army posts instead of “soft targets”

• The Pershing Expedition faced a significant defeat at Carrizal on June 21, 1916, where 11 American soldiers were killed and 24 taken prisoner.
JUNE 1916 TELEGRAM
• The U.S. had more to lose, as Wilson could not afford war with Mexico. This was especially true as U.S. entry into World War I loomed closer

• Wilson extended de jure recognition to Carranza’s forces and withdrew the Pershing Expedition

• Though cross-border violence in Texas came to an abrupt end Ranger violence against Hispanics reached new heights, while Ferguson issued a proclamation demanding that Tejanos make a positive demonstration of loyalty or face the consequences

• The spectre of violence didn’t disappear with the suspension of Plan de San Diego raiding in 1916—elements of the Texas Rangers were assigned to be “Loyalty Rangers” with activities including the monitoring of voting at polls in South Texas
FERGUSON’S PROCLAMATION

“The State of Texas demands of all persons while in her borders absolute obedience and respect to her laws and constituted authorities. If Texas Mexicans will aid, by words and by deeds, the various peace officers in Texas to carry out this demand, they need have no fear of bodily harm, and they will receive the protection of our laws. If they do not in some manner show their loyalty to this State and Nation they will bring trouble upon themselves and many crimes will be committed which cannot be prevented... unfortunately, the prejudice of many Mexicans who might otherwise remain loyal to Texas, has been aroused by bandit leaders from Mexico, and a feeling of hatred exists along our Texas borders, which should not be.

In the future when one of these bandit leaders from Mexico comes among you and tries to tell you that Americans want to mistreat you and wants you to join some secret movement, report him at once to the first officer you can get to. Report the names of Mexicans who are mixed up in the gang. Show that you are loyal to this country, and, as Governor of Texas, I guarantee that you will be protected from all harm...

I earnestly invite the help and co-operation of all law-abiding Mexicans in keeping down any race hatred and strife. If you do not want to confer with the officers write me direct at Austin. But the better plan is for the good Mexicans to get in close relation with the officers and who them that you are loyal citizens, and there will be no trouble in Texas.”
In this image, the hand of Germany carves the United States into portions for Mexico, Japan, and Germany. Though Japan fought with the Allies, Germany saw the Japanese as natural allies. In the U.S., distrust of Japan was reinforced by incidents such as the grounding of the Japanese cruiser *Asama* in Baja California. This distrust was further exacerbated by reports that the editor of the newspaper *Südgraffito* in San Francisco had offered to recruit a force of up to 2,500 Japanese and Japanese-Americans to fight for Carranza, as well as later reports that Japan planned to establish its own independent state in Baja California. Clifford Kennedy Berryman, “For Myself,” *Washington Evening Star*, March 1917. Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, LC-USZC4-13594; Ito Inamura Kunimoto, *Japan and Mexico*, 1888-1917 (PhD diss., University of Texas, 1970), 205, 234-235.
From late 1917 to early 1918, Lieutenant Lothar Witzke attempted to instigate an uprising in southern Arizona.

Witzke hoped his agents could foment a strike among copper miners, to be instigated by the Industrial Workers of the World. They also hoped that the largely African American 9th and 10th cavalry would join the revolt.

Witzke’s attempt was thwarted in a remarkable counter-intelligence operation by U.S. intelligence operatives working with British Naval Intelligence. Witzke was the only enemy agent sentenced to death in World War I, though his sentence was later commuted.
Despite the fact that Japan fought on the side of the Allies in World War I, U.S. officials were increasingly suspicious of Japanese influence in Mexico and openly expressed concern over the number of Japanese nationals who had emigrated to western Mexico, principally Baja California.

This sentiment was expressed in everything from early serials that included the Japanese as principal villains (*Patria: A Romance of Preparedness*) to suspicions regarding the stranding of a Japanese naval vessel in Turtle Bay. At one point, the *Los Angeles Times* claimed that several thousand Japanese sailors and several warships had occupied the area.

Compared with other parts of the international boundary, the California portion of the border remained relatively peaceful. Americans, nevertheless, remained highly susceptible to rumors, such as allegations by one priest in San Diego that a large number of veterans of the Russo-Japanese War and resettled in Ensenada.

Collectively, these fears fueled everything from calls to annex Baja California to increasingly rabid anti-Japanese sentiment in the U.S.
MILITARY LEGACIES

• These conflicts very clearly prepared U.S. armed forces for entry into World War I. Command and control over the National Guard improved significantly as well. The ability of U.S. presidents to have the power to deploy the National Guard was seen as necessary in light of the standing army of this size being relatively small.

• There is a bit less appreciation for the degree to which these conflicts prepared the U.S. military for World War II. Patton engaged in a noted mechanized chase in the course of the Pershing Expedition. Bradley was posted to southeastern Arizona during this period and came to appreciate the potential for trucks in transporting infantry rapidly.
IMMEDIATE LEGACIES

• Resistance to draft registration—this may not have seemed significant, but the U.S. Army of 1917 was 20% foreign-born with 25% of total forces speaking little to no English

• 1917 Bath Riots

• The Porvenir Massacre

• Pardon of imprisoned sediciosos by judges in Texas and villistas by Governor Octaviano Larrazolo

• The Houston Riot of August 1917

• “Loyalty Rangers”

• 1919 Canales Hearings in Texas—no Hispanics were elected to state office again until 1954

• Some disgraced Rangers found employment in new agencies such as the Border Patrol
FURTHER READING


