



the 51st state

inside the checkpoints

by Jay J. Johnson-Castro, Sr.



While the 1250 miles of the Rio Grande corridor constitutes the most recognized border of any state of the U. S., we fronterizos from one end of the Texas-Mexico border to the other have long lived in a disconnect, from each other. That disconnect is not an accident. While we might have different geology between El Paso and Brownsville, we also have some of the greatest continuity of history and culture of the all the Americas. We are the confluence of all the Americas, from Alaska to Argentina. We are the blend, the mix, of the two great cultures of the "New World".

Yet, the State of Texas, from the Governor's office on down, have parceled our borderlands into divisions that do not easily allow for the solidarity of those of us who live along the most famous and recognized border of any state...the Rio Grande. The Texas Historical Commission has our border divided into three parts; the Texas Parks & Wildlife into a different set of three regions; and the Texas Department of Highways into yet a different three regions. Even the political boundaries of the State carve us up like a jig-saw-puzzle.

It's no wonder that El Paso feels isolated and disconnected from Presidio. And Presidio feels disconnected from El Paso, let alone Del Rio or Eagle Pass. The latter two feel isolated from El Paso, Presidio...let alone from Laredo and the Valley. The Valley feels independent from all the rest, maybe even feeling that the Valley IS the Texas-Mexico border.

The only time the ruling elite view the Rio Grande corridor as one entity with continuity is when they want to "control our borders" or make a political statement to Mexico. It could not be

rest of the State and the rest of our country chooses to dump their refuse and rejects.

Despite this purposeful division imposed upon our border region by those in power, we the people of the Texas-Mexico border are becoming a model of regional solidarity. From El Paso to Brownsville, and all points in-between, we have begun to come together as one people to fend off a grotesque, sinister, insane and immoral assault on our environment, our economy, our culture and our amistad. We who reside in confluence of all the Americas, with the two major languages of the Americas, have begun to rise up in solidarity in opposition to racism and supremacy.

So, what if our Rio Grande corridor were the 51st state of the United States? How would we compare? Since 1996, Texas State Senator, Eliot Shapleigh, of District 29, (El Paso area) has been trying to get the word out about how neglected the border region is. He defines our border as a 43 county region. He then takes our 43-county region and rates us as if we are the 51st State. The study compares us to Texas as a whole, to non-borderlands Texas and also to all the other states. You can find this gem at <http://www.cpa.state.tx.us/taxinfo/taxforms/96-599/appen1.pdf>

There are some amazing observations in this study. Most notably, our border region, if it were the 51st state would rank #1 in poverty and unemployment. It is also #1 in the country in Spanish spoken at home. We would rank #16 in land size. Wow! We would be larger than 35 other states of the U.S.A.

We would also be the third largest state with a foreign born population, and the third largest with a female head of household. A true land of immigrants. We would be fifth with those in military duty. We would be the sixth fastest growing region in the United States. We would be 24th in population with some 4 million residents. We would be dead last...the 51st State, in average income.

This is the land that Texas north of I-10 and west of I-37 rejects as not being Texan-enough or American-enough to respect. They do not want to become like us. They don't want to be bilingual, like us. They don't want the "racial landscape" to get any darker. Without even defending fellow Texans to the south of their more prosperous part of the state, they are willing to allow a Berlin-like wall to cut right through our community.

While we are not a 51st state...it's an interesting comparison to see how we would compare. In the face of tyranny however, we're going to stand up like one, and make sure that democracy works in our behalf of our borderlands. As proud Texans and Americans who love our neighbor as ourselves, we are going to have to dig deep within, reach out in solidarity to the rest of the Rio Grande corridor and defend the land we love, the land "inside the checkpoints". - December 29, 2007

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Twin eagles on the international dam of Del Rio, TX and Ciudad Acuña, Coahuila. Amistad should exist. Photo Credit: Jay J. Johnson-Castro, Sr.

any more apparent then now. The border wall!

Probably since the political boundary between the U.S. and Mexico was forged as a result of the Mexican-American war, supremacists have looked down upon this bi-lingual world of ours that we love so much and call home. Since, in the eyes of many Texans north of I-10 and east of I-37, our region is nothing more than the bastard child of the State, imagine how the rest of the country feels about our border culture.

We're viewed as the logical dumping ground of everything from nuclear waste to human rejects. From the ASARCO plant in El Paso that leaches arsenic into the Rio Grande to the proliferation of internment camps for desperate immigrants and refugees, such as Raymondville, the borderlands are where the