



The U.S. - Mexico Border Region: The Need for Surges or Nation-Building?

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Author(s):	<i>Katherine Selber</i>
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Special Issue Editor Comments

Katherine Selber

Those of us who have studied, traveled, worked, and lived our lives along a broad U.S. – Mexico Border area have often been perplexed by the lack of special focus on our southern border from federal officials in particular. World events, however, have a way of bracketing our lives with meaning and punctuating the obvious. The dramatic increase over the last year in drug cartel violence along our southern border has served this purpose. As policy-makers, health and human service professionals, state and federal elected officials, and a host of other public safety and homeland security professionals attempt to deal with the fallout from these events, various perspectives and calls for action on the many complex issues have increased in the public media.

This special edition of the Journal represents an effort to bring a variety of disciplines and perspectives together, setting the context for a deeper look at and understanding of recent events. The special edition will be a two-volume focus on the Border, its history, recent events, perspectives on health and human services, and challenges such as law enforcement and public safety. What makes this special edition unique and what contributions does it make to public discourse and understanding? First, it represents a collection of articles written by people who have been there, worked, and lived along the border. Experience is helpful and a good instructor. Washington is far away and we are not. Secondly, by pairing the historical and the recent it paints a more pragmatic and realistic picture, providing greater perspective. In America perspective is needed on a range of social, economic, and security issues. And lastly, this first volume promotes a foundation for understanding, an underpinning, for a second, more prescriptive look at the area in the next volume.

The articles in this volume provide a lens that we hope will add to our understanding and at the same time bring focus to the issues. Dr. Michael Lauderdale's article is written from a historical

and anthropological perspective, tracing Mexico's roots back centuries and giving us cultural insights that help us frame current concerns. His article provides readers a better understanding of history and regional issues, how those have shaped current border dynamics, and how these relate to a series of current challenges.

My article lends a qualitative perspective as a program developer in health and human services reflecting back on my work in Mexico over twenty years ago in terms of the importance of social capital and capacity building partnerships between academic and health and human service providers.

Dr. Salvador Montana and Dr. Stephen Cooper's article looks at California's San Joaquin Valley as a case example of the impact of drug trafficking on issues relevant to health and human services infrastructure, especially as these issues shape the environment of families and clients of service providers. Based on extensive travel along the Border, Journalist David Danelo provides a "boots on the ground" perspective of economic and social challenges and of possible solutions for security. From his perspective as a veteran in Iraq in his book *Blood Stripes: The Grunt's View of the War in Iraq* to a veteran of Border understanding in his book *The Border: Exploring the US-Mexico Divide*, his article supplies the volume a realist's perspective.

Finally, Dudley Althaus, the respected long time Border journalist, has written an article that guides the reader's eye to a final, inescapable conclusion of both the gravity of the situation and its intractable nature. His long history of writing on the topic is evident in its concise depiction of a changed landscape.

A second volume on the Border is in preparation now and is due out this summer. It will provide a law enforcement look from federal and state perspectives, more health and human service material, as well as possible prescriptive articles that chart possible paths forward. The Border has always had an enchanting lore, its people always

proud yet with many contradictions that added to its mystique. This mystique is now needing a new and better ending and must be reexamined and its narrative rewritten.