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A History of Friendship Park

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WHAT IS FRIENDSHIP PARK?

Friendship Park is the only designated bi-national meeting point along the US-MX border. It's a space where friends and families separated by the border wall can come to be together. The park was created in 1971 as a space intended to be shared by both the US and Mexico. But as our relationship with our neighboring nation has become more tense, as we have begun to build an increasingly secure wall along the border, Friendship Park has suffered. As the border has become more militarized and secure, so has the park. As our two countries have become more divided so have the friends and families that depend on this space to be in physical contact with each other. And with President Trump's election and his promise to build a bigger border wall, this park is at risk of becoming more divided and militarized than ever.

With recent developments in the border wall, I became interested in better understanding our shared history with Mexico. My goal going in to this thesis was to understand the history of the US-MX border and the political events that lead to increases in security along it. I also wanted to better understand the social implications of this.

It is my belief that there is no better space than friendship park to show the way the border has changed through the years and how this has directly affected real people. Friendship Park has, in many cases, been one of the first spaces along the border to see security increases as the border transformed to match the politics surrounding it. It is also a very tangible, powerful space to fight for human rights regarding border politics, and the park has very much transformed to reflect that as well.

This book outlines the political events that affected our relationship with Mexico. It shows how these events lead to security increases along the border (specifically friendship park) and it explores the social implications of these security increases.

As simple as it sounds, what I took away from this project, and what I hope you take away from it, is that politics affect very real people. The decisions we make about this border wall will affect families that just want to be together. Yes, our national security is important but before we build a bigger wall I hope we can recognize the social implications of doing so.

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PRE-PARK HISTORY

Before Friendship Park was a bi-national meeting point, it was a home to Kumeyaay native Americans, part of the territory disputed by the United States and Mexico during the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, and home to the first international boundary line markers.

1825–1848

KEY HISTORIC EVENTS

DISPLACING THE NATIVE AMERICANS

Before discussing the shared history of the United States and Mexico and its effect on Friendship Park, it is important to recognize that neither nation was the first to settle this space. Friendship Park was originally settled by the Kumeyaay Native Americans. Both countries have a history of displacing Native Americans for their land and Friendship Park is no exception.

THE MEXICAN-AMERICAN WAR

Not long after the United States declares independence in 1776, Mexico wins its own fight for independence from Spain in 1821 and becomes a republic in 1824. These two newly formed countries hinged quite a bit of their national pride on what is now the western part of the US. Mexico thought of its northern land as artifact of winning their fight for independence. The United States craved expanding its territory, the Louisiana purchase in 1803 and acquiring Florida from Spain in 1819 fueled this. The US justified territorial expansion through the manifest destiny doctrine, a widely held 19th century American belief that the US was meant to expand across the continent.

The United States began attempting to buy territory from Mexico as early as 1825 and were repeatedly rejected. This only made American expansionists aggressive. US President James K Polk uses manifest destiny as his campaign platform in 1845. Texas succeeds from Mexico in 1836 and is incorporated as the 28th state in 1845 under Polk's presidency. He provokes Mexico by making a proposition to buy the disputed territory between the Nueces River and the Rio Grande, and in 1846 the two nations quickly fall into war.

While both the US and Mexico were newly formed countries, the US had very obvious advantages in the war. Mexico's military was already weakened from a war just 25 years prior. Its central government was located in Mexico City, far south from its territories in the north. This national disconnect created by the miles of desert made defending the northern territories difficult. Any support given went towards defending against the aggressive apache native Americans which targeted these vulnerable cities. The US saw these weaknesses as the opportunity to start a bloody conquest war on Mexico and justify it through manifest destiny.

WAR ILLUSTRATION

US war paintings from the time tend to portray the fight as fair when in reality it was a massacre.

THE TREATY OF GUADALUPE HIDALGO

Within a few months of starting the Mexican-American war, the United States had gained control over Mexico's northern territories. These territories had already weakened by Apache Native American raiders. By 1847 the two nations began peace negotiations as the war continued.

Since the disputed territories were sparsely settled neither nation really knew what they were negotiating over. In the absence of a geographic understanding, the negotiators

fought over a few well known landmarks such as San Diego bay and the Nueces river. They created potential borders by drawing straight lines to connect them. The map to the right illustrates some of the borders discussed. As the Mexican-American war came to a close it was clear the US would gain territory but the amount varied greatly. Discussions came to an end in 1848 when President Polk ordered the US negotiators to gain the city of San Diego as part of the US territory.

POSSIBLE BORDER BOUNDARY LINES

Pictured above in red are the possible boundary lines discussed during the Mexican-American war negotiations. The orange represents the territory disputed during Texas's succession to the US.

Pictured to the top left is the original border marker (monument #258) in what is now Friendship Park. Photo courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration.

BORDER FIELD STATE PARK

Border Field State Park is created and dedicated by first lady Pat Nixon in 1971. However the idea for a bi-national park in San Diego was actually first conceived in 1961 by Sidney Cornell, the president of the San Diego South Bay Historic Society.

1961-1971

SOUTH BAY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

MONUMENT #258

Photos courtesy of the National Archives
and Records Administration.

Though politics along the border continued to shift as more settlers came west, the space that is now Friendship Park remained relatively isolated from 1846 to the 60's. The land surrounding the monument became a navy base that only the occasional tourist would venture wander towards in order to see the US-MX boundary marker.

The idea for a park on the edge of the US-MX border was introduced by Sidney Cornell, President of the South Bay Historical Society,

in 1961. Though he eventually succeeded, It took him 10 years of fighting to turn the former navy training base in to a park.

In 1964 the passing of proposition 1 allowed the state of California to purchase land from the federal government to be used as a state park. The state was allocated \$150,000,000 to purchase land, Sidney Cornell advocated for Friendship Park to become a state park on grounds that it was a cultural resource. And it is, the first boundary line marker

from the end of the Mexican-American war stands in Friendship Park, and being so close to a neighboring nation is a resource in itself. Though Cornell's first few attempts were unsuccessful, the pitch eventually was accepted and the land was purchased by the state. In 1971 first lady Pat Nixon came to San Diego to dedicate it as part of her tour of the state parks.

PAT NIXON DEDICATES THE PARK

Pat Nixon visits and dedicates Border Field State Park in 1971 during her “Legacy of the Parks Tour”. Her visit signified the 370 acres of property being transferred to the state of California for recreational use as a state park. The ceremony took place where Friendship Park now stands.

At this point the US and Mexico were only divided by a few thin strands of barbed wire. However, even this border division looked out of place to the first lady. It is reported that Pat Nixon said “I hate to see a fence anywhere” and ordered for a section of the fence to be cut so she could greet Mexican spectators without having a fence in her way. This gesture forever marked Border Field State Park as a space that was originally intended to celebrate friendship between the US Mexico.

Before leaving the park she reportedly said “I hope there won’t be a fence here too much longer”. The positive, bi-national atmosphere of the ceremony did little to foreshadow the coming decades of politics, their social implications, and their effect on the park.

PAT NIXON VISITS THE PARK

A photo taken during first lady Pat Nixon's visit to Border Field State Park. Photos courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration.

POLITICS VS ACTIVISM

During the 70's and 80's political tensions with Mexico began to challenge the bi-national spirit of the park. A series of political and economic events lead to security increases along the border. This did not go unchallenged however, protests on human rights issues began to take place and the park became a space for activism.

1972-1989

BORDER FIELD STATE PARK'S FIRST DECADE

In the beginning, Border Field State Park was a truly bi-national space. Both US and Mexican citizens could move freely throughout the park, enjoying the natural park space and the beach. However, the bi-national spirit seen in Pat Nixon's dedication was very short lived for many local and national reasons.

On a national level, right as the park was created the Bracero program was being phased out by the federal government. The Bracero Program was created during World War II and allowed workers from Mexico to be contracted for seasonal occupations in the US. Though the program was phased out, Immigrants continued to come to the US for its job market. This caused renewed tension between the US and Mexico. Nativism, the idea that the US needs to protect those native to the country from immigrants, began to infect the nation. Perhaps because of this tension and nativism, the border was beginning to be sensationalized as lawless and dangerous by the media. This nativism did not go unchallenged, When President Carter

proposed plans for a border wall in the 70's, it caused a huge backlash from the Chicano community with protests lead by San Diego activist Herman Baca.

The social implications of this nationalist mindset and tension can be seen in the way the media began to write about Border Field State Park. News articles frequently mentioned that the park was used mainly by Mexican families though the land was in the US. This can be explained by the fact that the park is directly adjacent to the Playas de Tijuana neighborhood, the park was easily accessible from Tijuana. Whereas getting to the park from the San Diego is about a 30 minute drive. Border Field state park also never managed to secure funds to develop the space. This made improving and maintaining the space difficult. The park began to fall in to despair. This all helped the press portray Border Field State Park as a failed social experiment. In 1979 a new chain link fence is introduced into the park that once again separates the US and Mexico.

1971 BORDER FENCE

Pictured to the left is the border fence and monument #258 in 1971. Photo courtesy of the National Park Service Gallery.

KEY EVENTS IN THE 80'S

THE MEXICAN DEBT CRISIS

In the 60's and 70's many Latin American countries borrowed large sums of money to fund the industrialization their nations. Mexico did so under the assumption that they'd repay their debt with the profitable amounts of oil their nation was producing. So when the price of oil collapsed so did Mexico's economy in 1982. This economic crash was put on the backs of the blue collar workers. As the prices inflated, their wages did not. Working in the US became one of the only ways to escape poverty. Because of this, undocumented immigration in to the US increased dramatically.

NEARSHORING COMPANIES

US corporations began to move their operations near the border and in to MX specifically so they could take advantage of the displaced workers brought on by the Mexican debt crisis. This process is known as nearshoring. These nearshoring companies created a demand for workers at low wages and the displaced workers affected by the Mexican debt crisis filled it. California took most of the immigrants and, despite the fact that American companies were eager to take workers, tension and around the US Mexico Border increased.

THE WAR ON DRUGS

As tension over immigration in the United States increased, the Reagan administration also began placing importance on combating drug flow into the US. In the 70's the US and Mexico had been working together to stop the drug smuggling at the border. During the 80's drug flow into the US stopped coming through Cuba and started coming through Mexico. As the routes from Cuba to Miami were blocked, new ones were formed around the border. The US and Mexico's partnership in combating drug flow deteriorated in 1985 when DEA agent Kiki Palmer was captured and killed in Guadalajara.

IMMIGRATION REFORM CONTROL ACT (IRCA)

In 1986 President Reagan signs IRCA, the first major legislative act to address undocumented immigration through the US-MX border. While it granted legal citizenship to those who immigrated before 1982, it also combated undocumented immigration by increasing border patrol and implying there would be consequences for businesses hiring undocumented workers. But the Nearshoring businesses found a workaround in IRCA, they couldn't "knowingly" hire an undocumented worker so they just made it a point not to know the legal status of their workers.

FRIENDSHIP PARK MARRIAGE (1989)

Pictured to the right is the marriage of Emily Hicks and Guillermo Gomez Pena .

THEIR EFFECT ON THE PARK

President Reagan attempts to control the drug flow into the US and Border Field State Park becomes the perfect stage to show his success when a few drug busts take place at the park. The nativist outrage rings louder in the 80's as the Mexican debt crisis hits and more undocumented workers immigrate to the US to fill the demand of the nearshoring companies. The border continues to be sensationalized as dangerous, Border Field State Park is seen as dangerous too. Shortly after IRCA is enacted, and the Department of Parks and Recreation halts further development at Border Field State Park by designating three quarters of it as a wildlife reserve. While halting the development of the park was an act to preserve the wetlands and native species

habitat, it also diminished the chances of turning Border Field State Park into a larger visitor attraction.

The nativist mindset and increased security around the border did not go unchallenged. San Diego activist Herman Baca lead protests against building a new border fence during the 70's and continued to challenge political events around the border in the 80's. Border Field State Park begins to find its voice and becomes a space for activism when US artist Emily Hicks and Mexican activist Guillermo Gomez Pena marry at the park, separated by the fence to show that love conquers fear at the border and friendship is possible.

A PARK FACING MILITARIZATION

The 80's foreshadowed many of the event that took place in the 90's.
Failure to control immigration at the border becomes a federal issue.
The border becomes militarized with operation gatekeeper.

1990-2000

KEY EVENTS IN THE 90'S

IRCA FAILS

As mentioned in the previous chapter, IRCA fails to properly address the undocumented border immigration into the US. IRCA implied that companies would face consequences should they continue hiring undocumented workers. However there were loopholes in IRCA. Companies couldn't "knowingly" hire undocumented workers so they just made it a point to not know the legal status of their employees. IRCA only took the blame away from companies for hiring undocumented immigrants and put it on the workers.

HATE GROUPS FORM

because of the failures of IRCA to properly address immigration issues, the tension and nativism seen in earlier decades rang louder than ever. During the 90's San Diego saw the

rise of anti-immigration hate groups. While Los Angeles was actually home to more undocumented immigrants, San Diego became the main base for hate groups because of its symbolic proximity to the border. Monthly anti-immigration protests took place along the border near Friendship Park. To combat this, immigration human rights protests also became more frequent.

This hate group, nativist mentality bled in to San Diego's politics. This can be seen in the way California proposition 187 almost passed. Proposition 187 would have taken away social services from undocumented immigrants including denying their children access to public education. Nativism in the state had reached a point where many Californians were ready to deny children access to basic human rights such as an education

DOWNTOWN SAN DIEGO, BEFORE AND AFTER

On the left is San Diego's downtown in 1975

On the right is it in 1991

OPERATION GATEKEEPER

The 90's saw the first acts of militarization along the border. The federal government devoted military resources to the border for the first time in 1991 by fortifying high traffic corridors with new fencing made by surplus military materials. This militarization of the border quickly became normalized by many in San Diego. So when operation gatekeeper was enacted by President Clinton in 1994, the tone for a militaristic border had already been set. Operation gatekeeper was an attempt to control immigration along the San Diego border. Operation gatekeeper doubled the border law enforcement budget, funded

the construction of miles of new fences, and brought in an army of border patrol agents to be visibly stationed along the border in San Diego. The goal of operation gatekeeper was to deter undocumented immigrants but it actually just pushed them in to crossing away from populated areas and into the deserts. Crossing the border became more dangerous and inhumane than ever as immigrants had to face the harsh conditions of the desert to enter the US. Hundreds of immigrants have died in an attempt to enter the United States since operation gatekeeper was put in place.

OPERATION GATEKEEPER & THE PARK

As the border became more militarized so did the park. A new fence was introduced along sw border made of surplus landing mats from the Vietnam war. A road was added alongside friendship park for border patrol agents to have easier access to it as well.

PROTESTS IN THE PARK

Operation gatekeeper was seen as an act of fear and hate by many and sparked even more protests. In the 80's friendship park had become a place to bring a human voice to border security and to protest for the rights of immigrants. A group of artists known as inSITE94 used the space around Friendship Park to create site specific projects that protested the militarized border. One of the ways that they did this was by making artwork that allowed cross border dialogue. inSITE94 set up "free speech vans" on both sides of the border. Anyone could speak their mind via loudspeaker and it would be heard by everyone in the surrounding area.

The first annual "Posada" was held at the park in 1994 as well. Las Posadas is a catholic story that follows the Virgin Mary's and Joseph's search for shelter in Bethlehem, the scene is often recreated and acted out in the catholic religion to celebrate the story. San Diego border activist Roberto Martinez thought to relate the Mary and Joseph's struggle to find shelter in a strange, unwelcoming land to the hardships Mexican immigrants were facing as border politics worsened. While his first posada was not held at the park, the annual protest has been held at Friendship park every year after 1994.

INSITE94 PROJECTS

The artist group inSITE94 created interactive art pieces that protested operation gatekeeper. These included free speech vans and shooting a person through a cannonball in to the us. Friendship Park created the perfect backdrop for their projects.

THE PARK AFTER 9/11

The events of September 11th 2001 caused the United States to question its overall national security. Border security tightens drastically and this greatly affects friendship parks future. The park is closed indefinitely but due to a group of activists it is reopened under very different conditions.

2001-PRESENT

KEY EVENTS IN THE 00'S

TRIPLE FENCE CONSTRUCTION

The tragic events that occurred on September 11th 2001 caused the nation to question its security. Two additional border fences are added to Friendship Park and other high traffic areas.

SEPTEMBER 11TH

On September 11th 2001, the United States experienced a devastating breach in national security. Four coordinated terrorist attacks were carried out by the Islamic extremist group Al-Qaeda. Almost 3,000 people were killed by these attacks. Fear and insecurity washed over the US nation and brought to question just how far the US government is willing to go to make the nation more secure. While none of the 9/11 terrorists had crossed into the US through the US-MX border, it was tied to national security concerns nonetheless. The border becomes the stage to show national security reforms.

THE NEW BORDER WALL

When US-MX Border immigration became linked with national security, the unfinished operation gatekeeper projects such as extending the border wall in the Pacific Ocean were given immediacy. Plans for a more secure triple layer fence in high traffic corridors such as San Diego began to circulate in Congress. This was heavily supported by conservative leaders in San Diego such as Congressman Duncan Hunter and Randy Cunningham. However these plans did not go unchallenged. Most of Border Field State Park is a wetlands reserve and many local, state and even federal groups recognized

that building an additional fence around the border would devastate the environment. Despite the criticism from environmental groups, in 2005 the Real ID Act was passed which allowed border construction to begin and bypass many legal and environmental requirements. The money to fund the fence construction followed in 2006 in the Secure Fence Act. 35 million dollars was allotted to creating a secondary border wall. In 2008 triple fence construction around Friendship Park begins.

FRIENDS OF FRIENDSHIP PARK

CREATING A COMMUNITY

The photos above show some of the community park activities brought in to the space by FoFP members.

The “Friends of Friendship Park” coalition officially forms in 2008 to protest fence construction around the park and the way this would negatively impact the families that used the space. One of the most key ways that they did this by taking the space back and creating a community. Coalition member Daniel Watman had already been doing this since 2004 with his project, border encuentro, which created a bi-national garden and community activities such as yoga and salsa dancing classes in to the park.

Reverend John Fanestil continued to add to this community by holding weekly church mass at the park and continues to do so to this day. His first service on June 1st 2008 was timed to be on world communion day. 27 different groups came to the park to hold communion and use the space to speak their minds on the injustices of border politics and the new fence. These organizations included environmental groups, religious groups and human rights groups, though they were from different backgrounds all of them shared the

common goal of protesting the triple border fence and of seeing this new triple fence as a disservice to both Tijuana and San Diego.

With the 2008 election of President Obama, Friends of Friendship Park saw a chance to stop the construction of the border wall. They lobbied to gain the support of local and state leaders to petition to Obama’s administration.

FRIENDSHIP PARK CLOSES

In 2009 Border Patrol announces its plans to close Friendship park indefinitely while the additional wall was being constructed. Friends of Friendship Park switched from trying to stop the wall to trying to save the park. They began to bring attention to the park through protests. Journalists and news anchors started visiting the park to cover the story, and the park began to gain more attention. Reverend John Fanestil continued to hold service at the park every Sunday until

he was physically detained by border patrol on February 21st 2009, coalition member Daniel Watman was also detained by the San Diego Police Department as he tried to save the bi-national garden. Despite the coalition's efforts the park was shut down as the additional fences were built. The park re-opened in time for the annual "La Posada" but under very different conditions.

FRIENDSHIP PARK OPENS UNDER NEW CONDITIONS

Friendship park opens once again, but the conditions were more militaristic than ever before. There was no longer access to the main fence, beach or bi-national garden. US visitors had to enter the park through the new additional gate, past border patrol agents and in to the park circle where they were kept about five feet away from those on the other side. The park was only open for a few hours on weekends and the visitor limit kept to 25.

The coalition realized that the park's fate was in limbo and would be determined at a local level. San Diego architect James Brown joined the coalition with a vision of a truly bi-national park and border patrol agreed to meet with the coalition to determine the fate of the park. The coalition went into the meetings asking for access to the historic monument, the bi-national garden, and the beach. Eventually the border patrol gave the coalition access to the monument with the contingency that a new fence would be put in along that area. The final design was a 12 ft tall steel mesh fence woven so tightly that families can barely touch fingertips between the gaps. While the park managed to stay open much in part to the efforts of the coalition, the environment had once again shifted to become even less inviting.

FRIENDSHIP PARK TODAY

This resilient park has survived decades of increasingly intense politics and has adapted to reflect the political climate through the years. It has seen powerful human rights protests, has seen hundreds of families normally separated by a border come together. Families still gather at the park every weekend to visit despite the conditions. The Friends of Friendship Park Coalition still fights to give the space a sense of community. In my opinion this relatively unknown park truly represents our relationship with Mexico and brings a human voice to border politics. These policies affect real people and keep them separated from their loved ones.

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PHOTOGRAPHY

Thank you Friends of Friendship Park for allowing me to use your photo archive from the 80's to present day.

Photos of Pat Nixon and of the historic monument #258 are courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration and the National Park Service Gallery.

GETTING INVOLVED

Friends of Friendship Park is a wonderful coalition that advocated for Friendship Park. They were kind enough to share their resources and knowledge with me and to give me a tour of the park when I visited it.

If you are interested in learning more about the park or getting involved with it, they are the experts. Their information can be found to the right.

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FACEBOOK

www.facebook.com/FofPark/