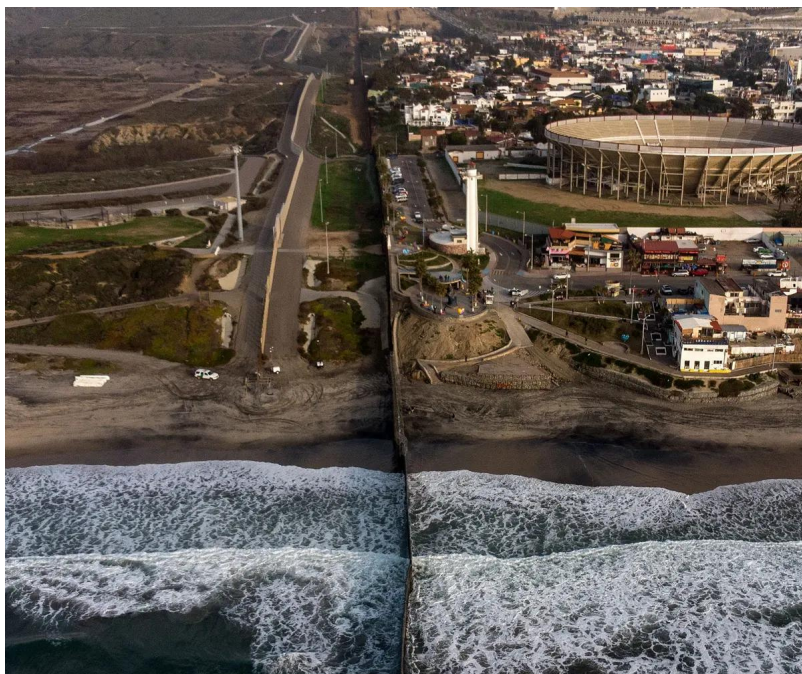


# U.S. AND MEXICO BORDER WALL EFFECTS



BY BEATRIZ LORENA CABRERA

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## METHODS

Each artifact was chosen based on what the author was talking about in the writing. She would look at her writing on the page and think about what the main take away from the paragraph was. Then, she would pick a photo based on that. The author wanted a photo to represent what the writing was about. Through this, the photo and her writing would be cohesive.

## KEY CONCEPTS

Before diving deeper into the topic at hand some vocabulary words need to be addressed because they are important for explaining the effects of the U.S. and Mexico border wall and will be mentioned throughout the zine.

- **Migrant-** "to refer to immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers who have crossed an international border, regardless of whether they have documents" (Chávez, 2013, p.153)
- **Macroaggressions-** "is an act of racism towards everyone of a race, gender, or group" (YWCAMarketing, 2021)
- **Principles of Environmental Justice-** "affirms the sacredness of Mother Earth, ecological unity and the interdependence of all species, and the right to be free from ecological destruction" (Pezzullo & Cox, 2022, p. 42)
- **Settler Colonialism-** "in a short period of time, [colonialism] inflicted displacement, drastic ecological changes, and lost or disrupted relationships with hundreds of species that indigenous people depend on through kinship ties for generations" (Whyte, 2019, p. 5)
- **Border-** "fences, both literally 'on the ground' and figuratively and conceptually 'in words' and 'on bodies,' used to restrict entry" (Ono, 2012, p. 22)

## INTRODUCTION

The actions of U.S. government policymakers have consequences that can significantly affect the world we live in. An example of this is a 30-foot-tall wall that runs 669 miles between the border of the United States of America and Mexico. The wall intends to keep migrants from crossing the border to enter the United States. Many politicians choose to not care or see the negative impacts of putting a border wall into an environment where movement is expected. The U.S. and Mexico border wall is altering and changing the future of nature, wildlife, and people who live in borderland communities.



03

IMAGE: POLITICO





**WHAT ARE THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF THE UNITED STATES AND MEXICO BORDER WALL ON HUMAN AND MORE-THAN-HUMAN ENVIRONMENTS?**

# *NATURE*



05

IMAGE: THE GUARDIAN

## ECOSYSTEMS AND HABITATS

When it comes to the wall, most people know it is meant to keep migrants from coming into the states. What often goes unnoticed are the different environments found at the border. The eight diverse ecosystems are “desert scrub, temperate forests and woodlands, semi desert and plains grasslands, subtropical scrublands, freshwater wetlands, and salt marshes” (Peters, et al., 2018, p. 740). All these environments continue to face endangerment because of the metal frames in the grounds and disrupting the natural order of nature. The border wall “would degrade and destroy critical habitat for 25 species, including a total of 2,134,792 acres that occur within 50 miles of the border” (Greenwald, 2017, p. 1).





The habitats that surround the border wall greatly impacted and disrupted the environment. It will “completely destroy these critical habitats, pushing species that are already endangered, threatened, or candidate species toward extinction” (Boekeloo, 2020, p. 346). The environments are being pushed to the limits of no return. The “border wall construction... also [will] harm native vegetation and spread invasive species, threatening the host plants the butterfly needs to reproduce” (Greenwald, 2017, p. 16). The spreading of invasive species can be very ruthless because this problem will only be helping the border wall by reducing and completely killing the biodiversity.

07

IMAGE: THE GUARDIAN



There is a type of butterfly called the Quino Checkerspot that resides along the border. The Quino Checkerspot butterfly homes will not be the only thing endangered but their ability of flying between Mexico and the United States of America will be stopped. The butterflies “tend to avoid flying over objects taller than 6 to 8 feet, so the wall would likely separate U.S. populations from those in Mexico, threatening the future viability of the butterfly in both countries” (Greenwald, 2017, p. 16).



The manufacturing of the U.S. and Mexico border wall furthermore brought along the construction of buildings, Klieg lights, and new roads along the boundary causing more disturbances. Because the “construction of roads threatens the biological integrity of the borderlands and all of the unique and diverse ecosystems and plant and wildlife assemblages within that broader region through direct habitat destruction and fragmentation and creation of barriers between wildlife populations” (Greenwald, 2017, p. 2). The effect is detrimental and trying to fix the mistakes will not be enough to undo all the damage made to these environments.

The destruction caused by new roads, Klieg lights, and buildings “eliminates or degrades natural vegetation, kills animals directly or through habitat loss, fragments habitats (thereby subdividing populations into smaller, more vulnerable units), reduces habitat connectivity, erodes soils, changes fire regimes, and alters hydrological processes (e.g., by causing floods)” (Peters, et al., 2018, p. 740). These issues can be lethal in certain situations. Due to the alteration of the “natural water flows and the patterns of wildfire, [this exacerbates] the risks of both to people and animals by trapping their escape” (Parker, 2019, para. 7).





By having this wall up, it is going against the Principles of Environmental Justice. One of the principles, “affirms the sacredness of Mother Earth, ecological unity and the interdependence of all species, and the right to be free from ecological destruction” (Pezzullo & Cox, 2022, p. 42). The quality of these natural resources is being poisoned. The wall is putting nature at risk and while some would like to argue that “it is just nature and it can grow back,” the reality is that nature is not as blank or as simple as popular narratives depict.



# *WILDLIFE*



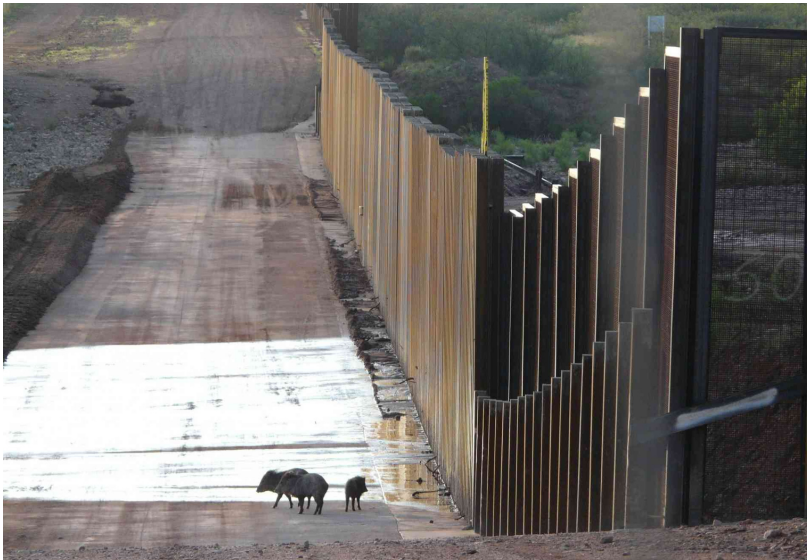
12

IMAGE: SKY ISLAND ALLIANCE



## THREATS TO BORDER ANIMALS

The wall was constructed to be incredibly tall and allows little to no space in between the slats. Therefore, humans can not fit, and because of this, neither can wildlife. Studies by the Center for Biological Diversity in 2017 report, “93 threatened, endangered and candidate species would potentially be affected,’ ‘critical habitat for 25 species’ would be destroyed, and ‘movement of some wildlife’ will be precluded” (Boekeloo, 2020, p. 346). The following pages will display the different types of animals that can be found at the border.



## JAGUARS

These sleek cats with black and tan fur “range from five to eight feet long and can weigh up to three hundred pounds” (Boekeloo, 2020, p. 346). Jaguars have been stopped along the border and “since 1990, there have been 195 jaguar sightings [...] many occurring in Arizona and New Mexico in the United States and in Sonora and Chihuahua in Mexico” (Boekeloo, 2020, p. 347). This wall would prohibit their movements between Mexico and the United States.



## OCELOTS

The ocelot is a wild cat that has black spots all over its body. They are “recognized as endangered in both the United States and Mexico” (Boekeloo, 2020, p. 374). Even though they are endangered, these cats are still being seen in both areas. There are “no more than one hundred ocelots live in the Rio Grande Valley in Texas, and there have been five such sightings in Arizona since 2009” (Boekeloo, 2020, p. 374). Ocelots are already suffering in numbers and the wall is only going to help the numbers decline since they will not be able to travel back and forth for their food.





## CACTUS FERRUGINOUS PYGMY OWLS

Hiding in cacti, these little birds will make their nests in the body of a cactus. The owl weighs, “about two-and-a-half ounces and measuring about seven-inches tall” (Boekeloo, 2020, p. 348). Cactus Ferruginous Pygmy Owls will only fly low. They “rarely fly higher than four-and-a-half-feet off the ground” (Boekeloo, 2020, p. 348). The wall is prohibiting their movement and since they cannot fly over the 30 foot wall, it is not possible for them to go through the wall. The slits between the walls are too small to fit their body sizes or their wingspan when flying.





A common harm that all these animals near the border wall and other wildlife, like the Mexican gray wolf and Sonoran pronghorn, are facing is the inability to roam free. If they cannot have that land, the animals will not be able to get the proper nutrients they need. They “require immense open areas and must travel long distances in search of food and water in the harsh desert environment, a task made ever more difficult by drought and climate change” (Greenwald, 2017, p. 15). Additionally, the wall limits their ability to procreate. To illustrate this, “the border wall would separate these pioneering males from potential mates and doom future reproduction prospects in Arizona” (Greenwald, 2017, p. 13).

The wall can likewise affect the migration of some animals. For example, the artificial night lighting from the Klieg lights at the border will cause migratory birds to “move away from the lights” (Eriksson & Taylor, 2008, p. 162). This can be detrimental to them in some cases because if they are “preparing for a long-distance flight, migrating birds may concentrate away from urban light-polluted areas, which presumably offer less vegetated cover compared to larger patches of forests available outside of densely human populated areas” (Cabrera-Cruz, et al., 2020, p. 12). The border wall affects the wildlife by disrupting their natural course of living and adopting to those new changes is something that is not possible for all of them. The border affects the flow of the animals and also the flow of human environments around this artificial barrier.



# *PEOPLE IN BORDERLAND COMMUNITIES*



19

IMAGE: CNN

## PHYSICAL EFFECTS

Physically, the border has put a lot of strain on the communities around the U.S. and Mexico border beyond the restriction of movement. One particular strain is on the water system. Water is heavily relied on “in this semiarid land, for it has shaped both the earth and the lives of those who live on it” (Ingram, et al., 1995, p. 50). A portion of drinking water is retrieved from groundwater. Although the future of groundwater is concerning because of the “increasing salinity and declining groundwater levels, serious shortages are expected in the near future, yet estimates of the nature of these shortages are quite variable” (Brown, 2005, para. 9).







Given water access issues, living in borderland droughts is a common experience. Even though “the native flora and fauna are largely adapted too these cycles of droughts, but city residents, industries, crops, and domestic animals depend on regular supplies of water” (Ingram, et al., 1995, p. 54). This inconsistency in water supply will make it difficult for residents to survive in the borderland cities. It is even more difficult with the overcrowded population of migrants who seek shelter in cities like Nogales, Tijuana, and other places. Due to “the industrial and urban policies of both nations have aggravated rapid population growth in border cities; national governments have stimulated the location of maquilas in border cities that possess inadequate water resources” (Ingram, et al., 1995, p. 48).



This insufficient water supply is unable to support this border population leading to dehydration and the development of illnesses. The significant “impacts of inadequate or poorly maintained wastewater systems in the Mexican portions of these twin cities include impairment of stream ecosystems, potential risks to human health and welfare, and marked reductions in the quality of life of the residents in these twin cities” (Brown, 2005, para. 12). It is a human right to have access to clean water and these cities are not equipped to handle the overflow of people. It too does not help that the “groundwater resources are also at risk from leaking septic tanks and leach fields in rural areas of the borderlands that lack centralized wastewater collection, treatment, and disposal facilities” (Brown, 2005, para. 11). An issue like this can be very damaging to someone’s life and the fragile environments that they call home. These delicate environments have many different identities dependent on these spaces.



## EFFECTS ON INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

There are many identities that surround the U.S. and Mexico border. One of them being the Indigenous people that inhabited these areas long before the border wall was put up. For instance the “Indigenous people who live along the border depend on the natural environment for their sustenance and survival, as well as for ritual purposes” ( Eriksson, et al., 2008, p. 163). There are also tribes like the Tohono O’odham Nation in Arizona, which for many years “has transported tribal members from Mexico to the United States through traditional border crossings for medical treatment” (Luna, 2002, p. 159).





However, due to the U.S. border patrol trying to crack down on "illegal" crossing and the "Drug War," there has been a heightened police presence at the border. Therefore "those who continue to use traditional border crossing areas are in danger of being shot by U.S. Border Patrol personnel, U.S. military, or vigilante citizen groups" (Luna, 2002, p. 160). Indigenous communities continue to face drastic changes and altering their traditions is not an option. How can it be "proper for nation states to deny indigenous peoples access to their traditional sites, regardless of which side of an international border they are on, or to restrict their family contacts or the continuance of their religions and cultures" (Luna, 2002, p. 161).

This injustice is a prime example of settler colonialism because the damaging ecological changes are disrupting hundreds of years of these species' kinship ties (Whyte, 2019). Throughout all these changes, the Indigenous people were not a part of or even considered in border wall conversations between the U.S. and Mexico. When “the treaties and agreements that set the international boundaries between the nation-states of the North American continent were negotiated and signed only by the colonizers” (Luna, 2002, p. 160). Not only were Indigenous people silenced, but other communities, such as Latine/ X people, some of whom also identify as Indigenous, are still be harmed to this day.



25

IMAGE: USA TODAY

## MENTAL HEALTH EFFECTS

The mental health of Latine/X people that surround the U.S. and Mexico border has been affected by the wall. Since the common assumption of the border is the edge of one land coming into contact with a new land owned by someone else, not enough people realize that a border can have more meaning than that. A border can be literal but also importantly be embodied, as people, based on how they look and speak, get boxed in to labels (Ono, 2012). The border effects include figurative acts that divide the Latine/X people and make them feel as “other” or as an “outsider.” These feelings can be detrimental to one’s identity and well being.





The “border acts as a separator or divider of people with different social, economic, and political affiliations, as a signifier of inclusion and exclusion, and as a way of determining one’s worthiness as a living being” (Ono, 2012, p. 22). A Latine/ X person’s self-worth can then affect their sense of belonging in the United States. In the article Saenz (2013) explains how “racial ‘macroaggressions’ that occur during policy formation and as a result of policy implementation have impeded Latinos’ sense of belonging.” These macroaggressions are used to place Latine/X people on lower pedestal compared to their American counterparts and makes them question who they are.



There are no positive effects for macroaggressions to be spread and especially by U.S. government. In the government, there are politicians like former President Donald Trump that have used his platforms to send inaccurate and hateful information out into the world about Latine/ X people.



**Donald J. Trump** ✓  
@realDonaldTrump · Follow



I love the Mexican people, but Mexico is not our friend. They're killing us at the border and they're killing us on jobs and trade. FIGHT!

5:57 AM · Jun 30, 2015



**Donald J. Trump** ✓  
@realDonaldTrump · Follow



The Mexican legal system is corrupt, as is much of Mexico. Pay me the money that is owed me now - and stop sending criminals over our border

4:47 PM · Feb 24, 2015 from Manhattan, NY



Untruthful tweets from someone of power can desensitize a person if they are seeing this information constantly and make them believe that it's the truth. The U.S. government also has made Propositions like 187 that is "sought to discourage immigration by eliminating health, education, and welfare benefits, seeing those crossing the borders as invaders, soaking up resources, and, through population growth and political power, ultimately seeking 'Reconquista'" (Ono, 2012, p. 22). By doing that, it creates the physical border into literal borders on Latine/ X bodies because no matter the legal status they will not feel safe or welcomed.

That kind of process takes away Latine/X basic human rights. There are “tragic stories of migrants afraid to purchase food at grocery stores and not going to, or taking sick children to, the hospital appeared” (Ono, 2012, p. 23). The fear controls their lives and dictates what they can and cannot do. The border has made Latine/X targets because anyone who resembles certain characteristics physically can be questioned by law enforcements. There is, “widespread racial profiling by INS agents who typically determined whether someone was an ‘illegal’ based on the person’s last name or how he or she looked or spoke” (Goodman, 2020, p. 138). It makes being Latine/X frightening and puts them on a lower pedestal that then causes a power imbalance between other races.



# *SIN FRONTERAS*





Sin fronteras, without borders, these different communities, wildlife, and nature would be in such a different place. They could all be in an environment that is healthy for all of their well beings and be around for a long time without any complications if there was no border wall between the U.S. and Mexico. Power imbalances are very much present and these communities don't have an audience that will want to listen to their voices. The government should want to care about these issues and not turn a blind eye. They should not give a voice to their racist views, like Trump did, or produce acts like the "Real ID Act, which gives the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) authority to waive any laws that slow the wall's construction, including the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)" (Peters, et al., 2018). The warning alarms are there; the border wall is harming the communities and the environments around it. The U.S. government chooses to ignore these issues. There is evidentially no environmental justice for these communities because there is no fair treatment or respect towards them.

In response to the injustices, people have continuously fought back against the border wall. One way they have resisted is by making songs about the issue. An instance of this is the norteño group called Los Tigres del Norte and how they sing about the importance of corridos being cultural archives of oppression and resistance. Their songs hold "testimonios" in their songs, like "Somos Mas Americanos," "We are more American." They sing:

"Ya me gritaron mil veces que me regrese a mi tierra,  
Porque aqui no quepo yo,  
Quiero recordarle al gringo: Yo no cruce la frontera, la frontera me cruzo.  
America nacio libre, el hombre la dividio."



"They have yelled at me millions of times to return to my land,  
Because I do not fit here,  
I want to remind the gringo:  
I did not cross the border, the border crossed me.  
America was born free, the man decided to divide it."



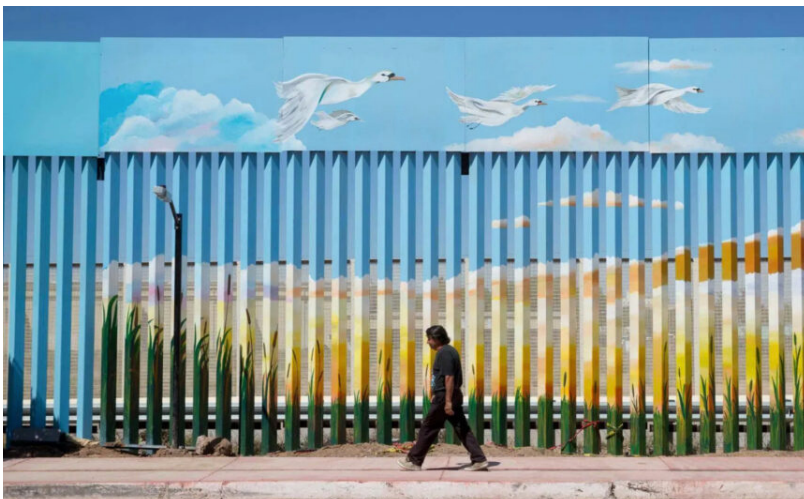
With this song and the album, "Uniendo Fronteras," this band is making it publicly known that a divider is up on land that was once free. The area was split without their opinions on the matter and the well being of people living in the borderland communities. When prideful nationalist discourse tells them to return to their land, how is it possible to go back when they are already on it?





The border creates separation and to try to challenge it, people have created art projects that involve connecting individuals on both sides. The project featured in the photo above was called "Border Tuner." There is a microphone allowing both sides to communicate and a small turn wheel moving the searchlights on the U.S. and Mexico side; when the lights connect in the sky, it creates a bi-directional channel (Falk, 2019). The conversations that one has through this project are faceless, but it allows for deep connection. Leon, a women interviewed about the art installation, lived in Mexico and now resides in El Paso, Texas. She describes that even though she left Mexico, "'I have roots there but it's a struggle to be able to go [and visit],' she said in Spanish. 'So it makes me emotional to be able to communicate with my country without barriers, a passport, inspections'" (Falk, 2019, para. 8). Despite this unnatural disruption trying to separate people, it is clearly not working. It is pasted time to remove these strategies and allow freedom of movement.

Ever “since the early 1990s, the U.S. government’s border control efforts have been driven by a ‘prevention through deterrence’ strategy” (Greenwald, 2017, p. 1). Prevention through deterrence is clearly not obstructing movement because the border wall was built in a place where movement is inevitable. A new strategy should be thought of instead. One where it does not destroy everything in its path. The U.S. and Mexico border wall tries to stop movement but it is unsuccessful and in the process, it is altering the course of nature, wildlife, and different borderland communities as demonstrated in this zine. The people who agree with the wall are too fixated on trying to keep migrants from entering the United States rather than looking at the consequences to their actions. Learning from past mistakes and having the willingness to fix them, can alter the future for nature, wildlife, and people in borderland communities so that these environments can be here for years to come.



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# CREATOR BIO

Beatriz Cabrera is a junior in the Clark Honors College at the University of Oregon. She is majoring in Educational Foundations and minoring in Spanish. Beatriz grew up speaking Spanish due to her family being from Guatemala and Mexico. She is a first-generation migrant in the States and was raised in a Latino environment in Los Angeles, California. Her grandmother on her mother's side crossed the U.S. and Mexico border when she was 32 years old in search of a better life for her family.

Beatriz grew up hearing that Latinos don't belong here and are "criminals" and should not be let into the United States. Beatriz wants people to see through her zine that is not true.



These migrants that are coming into the States are searching for a better life for themselves and their families. Who are government officials to dictate whether they are able to achieve that or not? A border wall does much more harm than good. There should not be a border wall between the U.S. and Mexico where

movement is to be expected from human and more-than-human environments.