

During the presidential term of Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994), many economic reforms were implemented in an effort to diversify Mexico's markets by expanding trade with industrialized nations. The most notable accomplishment of these efforts was the North American Free Trade Agreement, which took effect in January 1, 1994. However, before the signing of NAFTA, Salinas diligently negotiated other reforms such as the end of land redistribution, privatization of 85 percent of companies formerly owned by the government, and other neo-liberal policies to relieve Mexico of the devastating effects of its gamble on the oil market during the 1980s, the recurrent *peso* devaluations, and rampant inflation. By 1993, these measures had seemed to pay off given the numbers: inflation had been lowered to 10 percent and the foreign debt was reduced by approximately \$25 billion. The turnaround of the Mexican economy seemed to have presented the young president (46 years old at the time) with a promising future.

Yet, before the end of his term, chaos and scandal broke out in Mexico. An Indian revolt in the state of Chiapas, protesting the takeover of their lands by creditors and landlords due to the abolishment of land distribution and the *edipo* system by Salinas, threatened to start a civil war in the poverty-stricken states of southern Mexico. In addition, his brother, Raul Salinas, emerged at the center of a vast web of corruption and influence peddling. All this together began to show that Salinas' economic 'miracle' consisted more in creating "twenty-one new billionaires than in raising the general standard of living".¹ As Salinas's reputation continued to slide at the end of 1994, another unexpected yet crippling devaluation occurred.

Still extremely unpopular in Mexico, Salinas is blamed for a decreased standard of living, economic difficulties, the rise of the drug trade, and the massive corruption that occurred during his administration. Many Mexicans blamed economic policies such as NAFTA for Mexico's economic problems and the loss of their traditional livelihoods. However, the negative economic repercussions are not uniformly apparent in the different regions of Mexico. Contrasting the grievances of the Zapatistas of Chiapas against NAFTA, the northern border region has had indications of positive effects of these neo-liberal economic policies.

In the Mexican border town of Mexicali, Baja California, the social and economic effects of NAFTA and the globalization trend, appear very much evident. The years of Salinas' presidency brought to the Mexican borderlands many multi-national corporations, where they further developed the manufacturing or *maquiladora* industry. Historically, Mexicali was an agricultural center with farmers working in collaboration with their counterparts from the Imperial Valley, just north of the international border. Mexicali's commercial agriculture, composed of more than 200,000 hectares of irrigated land, is responsible for some of the largest crops in Mexico, including wheat and cotton. Moreover, Mexicali has become an important exporter of asparagus, broccoli, green onions, and radishes world wide. Despite Mexicali's position as a major agricultural exporter, there has occurred a shift of focus onto the manufacturing export sector. Multi-national corporations such as Nestlé, Coca-Cola, LG-Goldstar, and Kenworth to name a few, along with national companies like Bimbo and Sabritas, employ a significant portion of the Mexicali population. Aside from industry and agriculture, Mexicali is highly urban city where immigration and drug trafficking into the United-States has increased during the past two decades.

¹ Jim Tuck. High Hopes, Baffling Uncertainty: Mexico Nears the Millennium, Carlos Salinas de Gortari-President 1988-1994. 1999 [Http://www.mexconnect.com/mex_history/jtuck/jtsalinas.html](http://www.mexconnect.com/mex_history/jtuck/jtsalinas.html)

Thesis

My study seeks to examine the views of Mexicali residents who witnessed the impact of the Salinas reforms in one way or another, in order to discern if these people perceived either positive or negative effects from changes in the municipal landscape due to changes at the national level. Moreover, I will explore if Mexicali, as seen through the eyes of its residents, suffered the general decrease in the standard of living experienced by other non-northern Mexican states. The study will contribute not only to the study of borderlands, but provide much-needed information on Mexico and Mexicali during the 1980s and 1990s.

Method

The study will be carried out using methods used in the collection of oral histories, as explained in The Oral History Manual and under the guidance of both Professors Ruiz and Sereseres. In order to successfully undertake this research, more background research on Mexicali is necessary. Although there is little literature dealing with Mexicali during this period, I seek to inform myself through contacting historians and professors at the Universidad Autonoma de Baja California located in Mexicali. From these contacts, I intend to establish further contacts that will enable me to interview 30 people from different backgrounds such as: leadership positions, occupations, ages, political party affiliations, time of residence, etc. The background research, along with an interview with Social Scientist Maria de Rosio Barajas Escamilla, will help me develop a semi-structured interview outline, and prepare for follow-up questions for my subjects. With respect to the interview process, I will emphasize confidentiality by removing all identifying markers. Finally, being a native of the Imperial-Mexicali Valley and highly interested in its regional politics, I hope to familiarize myself with the process of conducting oral histories, while at the same time contributing to academia valuable information on the people and landscape of Mexicali.

References

Mexican Border:

<i>Author</i>	<u>Mora-Torres, Juan, 1956-</u>
<i>Title</i>	The making of the Mexican border / Juan Mora-Torres
<i>Published</i>	Austin : University of Texas Press, 2001
<i>Edition</i>	1st ed
<i>Title</i>	Organized crime & democratic governability : Mexico and the U.S.-Mexican borderlands / edited by John Bailey and Roy Godson
<i>Published</i>	[Pittsburgh] : University of Pittsburgh Press, c2000
<i>Author</i>	<u>Lorey, David E</u>
<i>Title</i>	The U.S.-Mexican border in the twentieth century : a history of economic and social transformation / David E. Lorey
<i>Published</i>	Wilmington, Del. : Scholarly Resources, 1999
<i>Title</i>	United States-Mexico border statistics since 1900 : 1990 update / edited by David E. Lorey
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Author Cartwright, Gary, 1934-
Title Dirty dealing : drug smuggling on the Mexican border & the assassination of a federal judge : an American parable / Gary Cartwright
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Author Urrea, Luis Alberto
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Teichman, Judith

Neoliberalism & the transformation of Mexican Authoritarianism

Centeno, Miguel Angel

After the Fall: The Legacy of Carlos Salinas

Other References:

- Interview with Rosio Barajas from El Colegio de la Frontera, Tijuana, Baja California
- Quinlan, Mary K. & Sommer, Barbara W.
The Oral History Manual

Timeline:

Phase I: November- January

- Background research
- Establish contacts
- Development of interview outline and questions

Phase II: February- April

- Conduct interviews
- Transcription of interviews
- Donation of collected interviews to a designated repository

Phase III: May - August

- Present research at UCI Symposium
- Write paper

Budget:

Travel (gas expenses).....\$426.60

5 Trips to Mexicali, Mexico.....\$387

215 miles/trip x .36 = \$77.40

\$77.40 x 5 trips = \$387

1 Trip to Tijuana, Mexico.....\$39.60

110 miles/trip x .36 = \$39.60

Equipment.....\$241.95

1 Transcriber.....\$200

4 Packs of Microcassettes.....\$41.95

Presentation.....\$50

Paper.....	\$5
Inkjet Cartridge.....	\$25
Copies.....	\$20
Compensation to Subjects.....	\$300
	\$10/subject x 30 subjects

Total: 1,018.55