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Abstract
By using the political theory of Manifest Destiny, Americans thought they had the right to expand their land in order to spread democracy. Leading up to the Mexican-American War, the U.S. tried to acquire lands from Mexico. After Texas was annexed in 1845 and the Rio Grande River was made the border between it and Mexico, the government commissioned explorations into this newly acquired land. Bryant Tilden’s Notes on the Upper Rio Grande, written in 1847 and published by Lindsay and Blakiston, is a travel journal written to survey the Rio Grande River in order to determine the possibility of military steamboat transportation. This book details the encounters between Tilden and the Mexican people, with a lithograph map by Thomas Sinclair. This paper argues that Bryant Tilden’s Notes on the Upper Rio Grande misrepresents Mexicans in order to justify U.S. superiority. By using postcolonial theory and the theory of orientalism, I will examine the text and images in Bryant Tilden’s Notes on the Upper Rio Grande in order to analyze how these misrepresentations of Mexicans were made.

Keywords
Bryant Tilden — Texas — Mexico — Manifest Destiny — Orientalism

Introduction
Thanks to the political theory of Manifest Destiny, Americans thought they had the right to expand their land in order to spread democracy. Leading up to the Mexican-American War, the U.S. tried to acquire lands from Mexico. After Texas was annexed in 1845 and the Rio Grande River was made the border between it and Mexico, the government commissioned explorations into this newly acquired land. Bryant Tilden’s Notes on the Upper Rio Grande, written in 1847 and published by Lindsay and Blakiston, is a travel journal written to survey the Rio Grande River in order to determine the possibility of military steamboat transportation. This book details the encounters between Tilden and the Mexican people, with a lithograph map by Thomas Sinclair.

This paper argues that Bryant Tilden’s Notes on the Upper Rio Grande misrepresents Mexicans in order to justify U.S. superiority. By using postcolonial theory and the theory of orientalism, I will examine the text and images in Bryant Tilden’s Notes on the Upper Rio Grande in order to analyze how these misrepresentations of Mexicans were made. In order to accomplish this goal, the paper asks the following questions: In what way does Notes on the Upper Rio Grande reflect the social and political context of the United States and its relationship with Mexico at the time? How does Notes on the Upper Rio Grande reflect the U.S. as a superior body who wanted to dominate Mexico? How do the representations of Mexicans made by Bryant Tilden and his men in Notes on the Upper Rio Grande reflect the idea of Orientalism? How was Notes on the Upper Rio Grande a part of the U.S. systematic exploitation of Mexico?

The following paragraphs employ an art historical object-based research method to analyze Bryant Tilden’s Notes on the Upper Rio Grande and the accompanying map. My analysis uses the theoretical framework of postcolonial theory as practiced by Edward Said, examining the controlling relationships between colonizers or imperialists and their colonial others [1, 2]. As Said concluded that in defining the East in its own image, the West justified itself, my analysis reveals that Tilden’s book and images generalize and makes assumptions about the Mexican people met during the author’s journey of exploration.
1. Tilden’s Notes on the Upper Rio Grande

Notes on the Upper Rio Grande is a travel journal written between October and November of 1846 by Bryant Tilden and published by Lindsay & Blakiston [3]. The thirty-page book details the journey of Tilden and U.S. soldiers aboard the U.S. Steamer Brown. The purpose of the journey was to explore the Rio Grande in order to see if military steamboat transit was possible. A lithograph map by Thomas Sinclair of the Rio Grande accompanies the book. Originally a sketch by Tilden, the map describes the characteristics of 300 miles of the Rio Grande.

In order to understand how misrepresentations of Mexico in Notes on the Upper Rio Grande came about, it is important to understand the history between Mexico and the U.S. at this time. Implemented in 1823, the Monroe Doctrine stated that European countries could not interfere in North or South America and that if they tried the U.S. would take these actions as threats and retaliate [4]. Then in 1845, Texas would be annexed into the U.S. and would become the 26th state. Because Texas would now be a southern state, slavery would be allowed once more after it had already been outlawed by Mexico. This action by Texas would sever all ties that Mexico and the U.S. shared. Now with Texas annexed, this would make the U.S. want to acquire additional lands from Mexico in order to expand its territory. Manifest Destiny was the idea that the U.S. needed to expand by spreading its ideas of advancement and democracy [5]. However this concept proved to cause controversy in 1846, when The Mexican-American War broke out.

The intervention by the U.S. changed the social aspect of Mexico. When the U.S. first began to intervene in Mexican affairs it was in order to protect them. With the addition of the Monroe Doctrine, the U.S. essentially shielded the Mexican people from all European powers. This allowed the U.S. and the U.S. only to intervene with the people of Mexico. However, after the war, the U.S. looked at the Mexican people as inferiors who needed to be dominated. This included U.S. citizens going into Mexico in order to survey the land resources in order to get a feel for what the country had to offer. These new findings resulted in the desire to exploit the land and resources. Because of these actions, the relationship between Mexico and the U.S. changed drastically from allies to enemies.

Because there is not any current scholarship on Notes on the Upper Rio Grande, examining past literature on both travel and expeditionary art is crucial for my analysis. Travel literature is necessary in understanding the perceptions created by those who travel and write about other countries. Raymund Paredes studies this in his article, “The Mexican Image in American Travel Literature,” which illustrates the U.S. perception of the people of nineteenth century Mexico as being both cowardly and dangerous [6]. This text shows how these perceptions are created through travel, however, it does not examine actual facts and details from real life expeditions. Because Notes on the Upper Rio Grande details an actual excursion that took place it is necessary to study the work of expeditionary art. Roger Balm’s “Expeditionary Art: Appraisal” reveals the strategic reasoning behind expeditionary art and how this was a significant form of documentation that allowed the U.S. to see the unknown lands of Mexico [7]. “Jungle Stories: North American Representations of Tropical Panama” by Stephen Frenkel on the other hand reveals that while the land of the unknown may seem intriguing, too much exposure to the unknown can be destructive to outsiders [8]. These works on travel, literature, and expeditionary art have helped by laying the groundwork for how populations and groups of people perceive and represent one another.

Finally, rather than images, Notes on the Upper Rio Grande only contains a single lithograph map by Thomas Sinclair. Analyzing this map has been crucial in helping me to perform the analysis on the U.S. perception of Mexico at the time. The book, Mapping Latin America by Jordana Dym and Karl Offen, helps to provide an understanding of how and why maps of Mexico and Central and South America were made and for what purpose. This includes what they describe as a three step process that mapmakers used in order to in order to represent borders between countries like the U.S. and Mexico and how borders bring about tensions both politically and socially [9]. For both of these countries, Mapping Latin America provides a framework into how their shared border, the Rio Grande, aids the American perception of Mexico as the other.

2. Tilden’s Cartography

While the book Notes on the Upper Grande only offers a single map, it can be broken down into several different components that cast Mexico as both the other and the inferior in comparison to America. The two main categories that the map can be broken down into are textual descriptions on the map and the actual image of the Rio Grande. My analysis will present the image of Mexico through Bryant Tilden’s description of natural resources, land, the people that lived along the Rio Grande, and the actual river itself.

My research reveals that the map in Notes on the Upper Rio Grande presents Mexico as a land of abundant natural resources. The map includes descriptions of areas of land that describe trees, shale, coal, and mineral reserves. Throughout the map there are 127 passages of text that describe these features. These descriptions are the most detailed and give the more information than any other text featured on the map. An example of this type of description is in “A Sketch of the Upper Rio Grande No.3.” The text on the map includes the elevation and shrubbery of the area as well as a description of the possibility of timber cultivation. By including the descriptions of resources, it is as if Tilden is documenting every possible resource that Mexico has to offer, similar to how the article Expeditionary Art: Appraisal describes the process of documenting resource inventory as an expeditionary objective [7]. Specifically, Tilden describes timber as something possible for furniture and a resource that would be easy
for Americans to cultivate [3]. When describing the timber, Tilden does not mean that this is an important resource for Mexico, instead it is a resource that Americans should take because it is abundant. Tilden also makes the statement that the only reason that Mexico has an abundance of resources is because they do not know how to use them. This statement generalizes the people of Mexico as ignorant and incapable of using even the simplest of natural resources.

Notes on the Upper Rio Grande also presents Mexico as a land with small dispersed groups of people. On five occasions, passages of text mark the locations of towns by name and by a physical marker on the map. Specifically, “A Sketch of the Upper Rio Grande No.9 details” the town of Presidio de Rio Grande. The town is described as having 2000 inhabitants, a small church that Tilden describes as “in ruins,” and has land for corn, sugar, and cotton farming. The space around the town is left blank in order to imply that it is land for cultivation and by doing this makes the country of Mexico look underdeveloped. By crafting Mexico as being an area of more land than people, this is another way that Americans find it possible to take this land. Likewise, when mapping out the town of Presidio de Rio Grande, Tilden makes several remarks regarding the style of housing. He calls them “wretchedly meager and insignificant in detail” as well as having an “appearance of antiquity.” Therefore in both the text on the map and in the book, the Mexicans are seen as occupying unsuitable structures in the eyes of Tilden.

Finally, the Rio Grande is presented as the only actual physical representation on the map. All other aspects such as shrubbery, trees, mountains and other landmarks are described as text on the map while the river is drawn as a thin line. Tilden’s mapping strategy is unusual for its absence of geography. As seen in “A Sketch of the Upper Rio Grande No.7” the map illustrates the vastness of land that surrounds the Rio Grande. The fact that the majority of the map is left blank, suggests that the river is the only thing that Tilden
saw, crafting the Rio Grande as the most important aspect for American viewers. The best explanation for why the map is depicted this way is in the very first passage of the text. Tilden explicitly states that everything he chose to include was what he thought was the most essential markers around the Rio Grande besides the river itself [3]. Therefore, because the Rio Grande is the only thing physically described, it can be inferred that it is the only important feature that Mexico can claim. His map does not include topography, elevation, or even a compass to read the map. Instead, what the map shows is a river and vast amounts of land that can be easily taken.

Figure 3. Thomas Sinclair, “A Sketch of the Upper Rio Grande No.7,” 1846, lithograph.

Tilden’s map does, and instead uses text to represent major towns and rivers. Nowhere on this map does Colton document anything other than names of specific places whereas Tilden uses his map like a notebook to jot down every resource he encounters. Secondly, when comparing Tilden’s depiction of Presidio de Rio Grande to Colton’s Mexico, it is clear that descriptions of housing and detailed notes such as populations of towns are not included. This is another aspect that Colton does not include because these details are not necessary to document the physical land. By including the populations and exact details of every town they come in contact with, Tilden is once again taking notes for the sake of future exploitation. Finally, Colton’s Mexico can be used as a comparison to how Tilden describes topography. Colton’s map shows various mountain ranges and rivers besides the Rio Grande thereby directly describing both sides of the Rio Grande topographically and does not leave mass areas blank. Tilden deliberately leaves his map blank in order to show both the abundance of land and the significance of the river. While Colton depicts both sides of the Rio Grande for pure documentary purposes, Tilden depicts Mexico as an easily targetable landscape with only a river as its significant marker.

Figure 4. Joseph Hutchins Colton, “Colton’s Mexico,” 1854, lithograph.

3. Conclusion

By looking at Colton’s Mexico as a comparison, it is clear that the way Tilden sketches and labels his map is a portrayal of American beliefs for the country of Mexico. Instead of only documenting the Rio Grande, Tilden describes the natural resources, the land, the people, and just about everything else in more detail than the actual river. His documentation makes it easy to believe that Tilden went on his journey in search of other information besides that of the steamboat communication. His notes and map are representative of key aspects of expeditionary art and his overall tone of his writing...
makes it clear he was taking notes on aspects of the land for the purpose of American exploitation. Tilden uses the concepts of Manifest Destiny, orientalism, and postcolonial theory when describing the aspects of Mexico. To Tilden they are seen as dangerous, weak, and ignorant. They do not know how to live off the land and thus America should use it to their potential because they have the capacity to do so. While Notes on the Upper Rio Grande was originally meant to describe the Rio Grande and one steamboat’s attempt to travel it, it instead became a journal to describe all other aspects of the land and its people, which in turn casts Mexico and its people as the other.

**Author Biography**

Christianna Reyes is a recent graduate of the University of North Texas, receiving a Bachelor of Arts in Art History and a minor in German. She currently works as an educator in the Center of Creative Connections at the Dallas Museum of Art. Christianna has been accepted into the Toulouse Graduate School at the University of North Texas where she will pursue a Master’s Degree in Art Education with a focus in art museum education.

**References**


