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Biannual newsletter on
homeownership in the Border

Homeownership Times

a border perspective

About Us

This newsletter is written by undergraduate students in the Border Research class (LABS 3301) at UTEP. The class and project is coordinated by Dr Silvia Torezani and sponsored by the Center for Inter-American and Border Studies (CIBS) and COURI. We aim at bringing relevant homeownership articles from El Paso and Ciudad Juarez once every semester.

GET IN TOUCH

If you have any questions, comments or are interested in collaborating with us, please email Silvia Torezani:

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This issue

Welcome ... **P.1**

The Immigrant Poverty... **P.2**

The Demolition ... **P.4**

Border Homes History ... **P.6**

Sources... **P.8**

Welcome

The housing market represents an important part of the border economy. The landscape of homeownership over the last decade or so has been shaped, to an important extent, by immigration. Violence in Juarez and the current COVID-19 pandemic have also played a role. We discussed some of the influences of the pandemic in our previous issue (February 2022). In this issue, we turn our focus to considering a variety of interconnected themes that include: the impact of violence in Juarez, triggering an exodus to El Paso and contributing to a surge in home sales in this city, as well as the phenomenon of abandoned homes in Ciudad Juarez. We move to the role of women in real estate in this border region who, despite gender-related income inequality, dominate the business and are rising to leadership positions. We then look at homeownership and cultural heritage in the case of Duranguito. Finally, we take a historical overview at the evolution of Hispanic homeownership in El Paso from the 1930s to the present.

The articles are written by undergraduate students based on their research of scholarly and media resources on the above-mentioned topics.

We hope you enjoy the content and look forward to your comments!

Silvia Torezani and Victoria De Anda



The Immigrant Poverty, ‘Danger’, and Political Responses

Ally Zepeda, Natalia Quiz, Rene Diaz, Daniela Valero, Joan Carreon Trejo, and Rodolfo Gamez, Silvia Torezani

El Paso and Juarez’s Ties to Homes

Contrary to perceptions that immigrants contribute to higher crime rates and insecurity, the opposite might be true. The immigrant revitalization theory argues that neighborhoods with high numbers of immigrant populations experience a reduction in violent crime. Furthermore, the arrival of new immigrants in an area with concentrated disadvantages reduces the number of homicides in those areas, making them less risky. A study conducted in San Diego, California, an immigrant gateway like El Paso, between 1960 and 2010, found that neighborhoods with a higher influx of immigrants had fewer homicides, with a decrease in crime in some areas. The reason for this decrease appears to be the fact that immigrants usually come with a mindset of improving their lives -the most common reason for their migration. Also, minorities tend to be overpoliced. In the case of Juarez, we see that toward the end of the first decade in the 21st Century, there was a surge of abandoned homes. Many were vandalized, and the theft of copper pipes, aluminum windows and other goods was frequent. Residents in these areas reported that these homes were used for the consumption and sale of drugs, as safe houses for kidnappings and potential human trafficking.



Photograph by Joan Carreon Trejo: people waiting to cross the El Paso- Juarez border.

Violence in Juarez

As many would know, Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, Mexico, is considered a dangerous city, positioned at the 20th place of the most dangerous city in the world, along other Mexican cities. The murder of men and women showed an unparalleled 31% increase (Timmons, 2018). Violence in Juarez has contributed to the increase in housing demand in El Paso, with 1 in 6 homeowners in this city also owning a home in Juarez.

During the pandemic we have seen or even heard of many families that struggle with their financial/homeownership situation, some even had lost their houses. Those fortunate enough to have a job or a reliable source of income may be working one or two jobs. Extreme poverty on the border has caused families to lose their homes and seek demanding jobs to meet their basic needs. Currently, it is becoming harder to meet the criteria for a mortgage loan or to receive a decent interest rate, such as: good credit history and proof of income (The city of El Paso Fair Housing Task Force, 2022).

Poverty in El Paso since COVID

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, El Paso has the 13th highest poverty rate among the large cities in the United States. Statistics provided by the U.S. Census Bureau have shown that El Paso surpasses the nationwide poverty rate by having 18% of our population living in extreme poverty. Despite government COVID assistance funds, many families continue to struggle financially due to loss of employment or earning below the minimum wage. The Pew Research Center reported that 59% of Latin families across the country have experienced the loss of jobs and pay cuts in their jobs. (Noe- Bustamante et al., 2021).

Demand of Housing in El Paso

Immigrant homeownership rates in the United States remain below the rate of native-born households 46.5 % to 62.9 %, although, the gap has fallen 22.2% (Miller, 2021). Despite having a lower rate of homeownership compared to non-Hispanic whites, immigration increases the demand for housing and rental accommodation. But it might also affect amenities and the perceived desirability of the neighborhoods involved in small local housing markets. Immigration may increase house prices directly by increasing demand.





Economic Impacts on El Paso Economy

The fore-mentioned points help us understand the importance of the border of El Paso and Juarez. The most relevant factor of immigration is the generation of a larger border economy, especially on the real estate and construction industries.

In conclusion, we saw that one of the main reasons for people to move to El Paso, in the last decade and a half, was because they got pushed out by the violence, that still continues. The pandemic also brought about the closing of ports of entry to all non-citizens and green-card holders, not only impacting family connections but the city's economy. Many workers were unable to cross the border, causing delays in the construction businesses, and disrupting family exchanges. Regardless of setbacks, we see that people have historically crossed the border to work and, sometimes, to settle in El Paso, and will continue to do so. These two cities are inter-connected and inter-dependent. We do not see this pattern changing anytime soon, if ever.



Photograph by Ally Zepeda



The Demolition of Duranguito: Yes or No?

Victoria A. Meyers, Nathan A. Lopez Cisneros, Jacob Avila, Mathew Fernandez

Introduction

The desire for newer, more modern living can often be at the crossroads of holding to cultural heritage. The city of El Paso, Texas, is currently dealing with such dilemma regarding the neighborhood of Duranguito. The city is attempting to build a multi-purpose performing arts and entertainment arena in the neighborhood of Duranguito. This neighborhood has historic value, formally being a part of Chihuahuita, a center of growth during the early expansion days of El Paso. Today, we will be looking at the history of the neighborhood, the current situation, reasons for the stadium, and what would be lost in its construction.

The History of Chihuahuita

You might be asking yourself what is Chihuahuita? It is a small and really old neighborhood that has been around for more than 150 years. It is located on the south side of El Paso along the Rio Grande. The residents of Chihuahuita call the area the “Ellis Island of the Border”. The reason for that is because the area of Chihuahuita has been around since the Mexican-American War in 1848, at the result of which El Paso had become part of the United States (Cimi"Alvarado, Jesus). The residents of Chihuahuita are people who crossed the Rio Grande in search for a better life and to escape the warfare of Mexico. Come to think of it, when people say that they want to live in a small town where everyone knows one another, then Chihuahuita was the place to go because the people there were all connected through cultural pride and commitment to help one another grow and survive. Chihuahuita had gained even more residents in the late 1800’s because of the creation of the Santa Fe Railroad, which opened more job and economic opportunities (Cimi"Alvarado). Chihuahuita is home to a whole generation of homeowners starting with the original homeowners. To this very day, the majority of the people who reside there only speak Spanish with some who are bilingual.

Fast forward to the present, and at the center of debate is the neighborhood of Duranguito, located to the south of Chinuihuita and Segundo Barrio, and at risk of being demolished to give way to “modernity” and stimulate economic growth. The City has plans to turn the area into a \$180 million 15,000-seat arena to host big concerts and a minor-league sports team.

Reasons for Building

Originally, the plan for this arena was to house the El Paso Locomotive FC, a soccer team, currently playing and practicing at Southwest University Park, home of the El Paso Chihuahuas baseball team. (Kaplowitz, 2019) Aside from just the soccer team, the city of El Paso has a number of reasons to host the El Paso Multi-Purpose Cultural and Performing Arts Center in the heart of its downtown. Above all else, the economic impact of having a large arena in El Paso could help to draw in revenue to businesses around town (Sanchez, 2020). Granted, most of the money would be going to establishments in the area. After all, downtown is host to numerous shopping districts, restaurants, and newly renovated hotels, many of which would gladly have the traffic coming their way. Though El Paso being able to host large concerts, sporting events, and more would drive up income from tourists throughout the rest of the city as well. Not to mention, the proximity to Ciudad Juarez and the border, which would bring in more people from Mexico. Much like Austin, Minneapolis, and other large cities, the addition of a multipurpose center is seen by some as the natural progression for the future of El Paso. (Kaplowitz, 2019).

Current Case

“The politicians and developers in El Paso have big plans for the downtown barrio known as Duranguito” (Gustavo Arellano). In the year of 2020, there was a 92 year old woman by the name of Anotonia Morales who was refusing to leave her home. Her reason for it was that she has been living in the historic neighborhood since the year 1965 and sees no reason to leave now (Gustavo Arellano). The demolition proposal had caused much dispute, to the point where there have been clashes between activists and the police, as well as the city council due to the high cost of courtroom battles. For now, the demolition has not happened. The latest court decision in March this year ruled in favor of providing \$29,000 to repair two damaged buildings in the neighborhood (Perez, 2022). We will continue to monitor the progress of this case. But let’s entertain considering some pros and cons.



Illustration by Victoria A. Meyers



Photographs by Victoria Meyers

Pros

The demolition of the Duranguito area in downtown El Paso will bring new attractions with the construction of the multipurpose arena. This arena will attract more tourists in the city that can predominantly help the city's economy in many ways. In addition to this, building the arena in this area will help create numerous new jobs, just like we saw with the new baseball stadium years ago built in the same area of the city. This arena will make the city of El Paso stand out and be in the spot of the eye for out of towners.

In relation to home ownership, the residents in the area would be relocated to other parts of the city. In the article, "*City gives Duranguito relocation update...*" states that most of the former residents were happy with their relocation. (Ktasm, 2017). This is due to the fact that most residents of the area have strong incentives for their houses and properties. According to the article, most got for

their properties close to \$200,000 while most business owners got close to \$300,000 by the city. The amounts paid out by the city were adequate amounts of money that allowed these residents to move to a place where the conditions of living are much better compared to the old duranguito properties. (Ktasm, 2017).

Cons

The city of El Paso has a number of reasons to host the El Paso Multipurpose Cultural and Performing Arts Center in the heart of its downtown. Above all else, the economic impact of having a large arena in El Paso could help to draw in revenue to businesses around town. However, after reflectin on our research on this topic, we have come to the conclusion that neighborhoods like Chihuahuita and Duranguito are prime examples of places that have historical value to the city of El Paso. Unfortunately, preserving this piece of El Paso history has recently been ignored in an attempt to bring more entertainment-driven revenue to the city. Although development of cities and their landmarks can be a positive economic opportunity, this can be put to question. What about cultural value? Why not consider investing in restauration and improve historical landmark areas like Duranguito? Places like Duranguito, have been around for many years and destroying them can bring negative effects. The deletion of historical artifacts or landmarks can create a blind spot in El Paso's history. Its destruction is something that cannot be undone. The historical educational opportunities that can be used to teach future generations would also be gone. And lastly, as long as there are people in El Paso or any other area that care for the town's historical and cultural heritage, there will always be an opposition to the destruction of Duranguito and other Landmarks like it. (Kaplowitz, 2019).

To Consider

After considering the pros and cons of this case, we, as a group, have come to the conclusion that the demolition of the Duranguito neighborhood would be a loss of cultural heritage, and disruptive for most of those who have made their homes there. Instead of tearing down the barrio, the city of El Paso should invest into bettering the community. When we visted the neighborhood while researching for this article, we saw a home/apartment area that was wood and looked as if it was burned very badly to the point where it can collapse at any moment. We saw elderly residents in these homes. Perhaps to consider is the possibility that if the stadium were to be built it may not attract the audience the city hopes for. There other parts of the county with open land areas, such as Clint or Horizon, where the stadium could be built without tearing down pieces of El Paso's history and the relocation of its people.





Border Homes in History

Alan Carmona, Eleazar Cordova, Shelbi Durant and Paola Marquez

Starting in the 1930s and beyond “El Paso continued to grow as the steady influx of immigrants from the interiors of the United States and Mexico drove the population upward beyond 100,000” (Martinez, 2021). Unfortunately, to-date (March 2022) the information regarding the U.S. Census for this period is still unavailable to the public. El Paso Texas has a complex homeownership history (Figure 1), from the house influx to the racially motivated separation of states. According to the city map of 1940 (Figure 7), 70% of the population was white. With the major influx of immigrants from Mexico and China the population fell short at 22%, as seen in Figure 2. The affluent sections of the city were “highly restricted. The more affluent businesses and professionals live in this section.” (Mapping Inequality). The lower sections were labeled as hazardous/dangerous and deemed uninhabitable. This division created the tenements in the south side of El Paso (Figure 3). By the 1970s over 50 thousand housing units were built. Around 19% of the population owned the housing units and 16% rented out such units. Housing units in south El Paso became the standard living for Hispanics and Mexican immigrants. The characteristics of these units became deplorable, with only two rooms and no indoor plumbing, it also held a population of 7,500, and they were often referred to as barrios. Most of the area residents spoke Spanish and earned an annual income of \$3,700.



Figure 1. Taken by Paola Marquez. This picture reflects the old El Paso mixed with the present day. Showing the old houses along with the modern architecture of the court house.

New residential construction expenditures in 2002 in El Paso stalled at approximately \$380 million. According to the Housing Market Analysis (HMA), from 2007 through to 2012, there was an exponential growth in population, affecting the affordability of houses in the area, which has declined since 2010. Rising home prices has made it particularly difficult for adults between the ages of 25 to 34 to access homeownership. The price increases has also made it difficult for Mexican immigrants to be able to afford a house, and many move to the colonias in order to build their “dream home” or to survive and make a living (Figure 8).

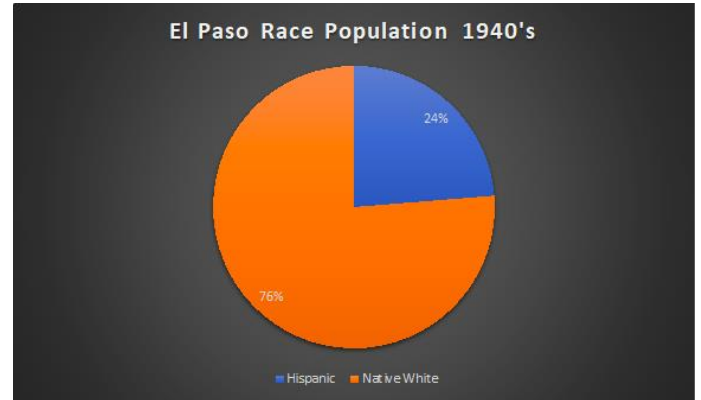


Figure 2. U.S. Census Bureau. (2021, August 25). TEXAS: 2020 census. The United States Census Bureau. <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/state-by-state/texas-population-change-between-census-decade.html>

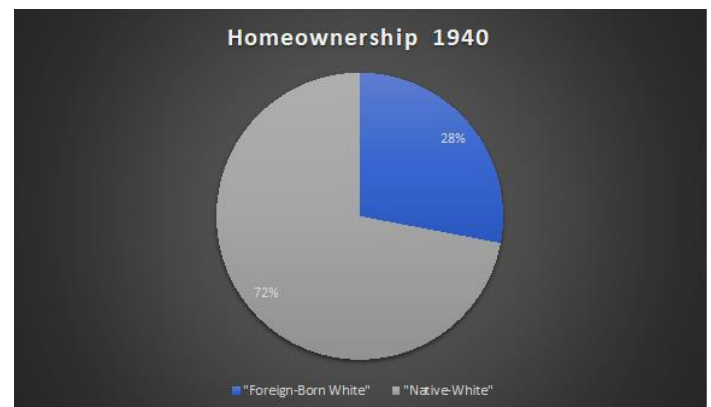


Figure 3. Mapping Inequality: El Paso Texas 1940. The chart shows the percentages of homeownership divided by race. Made by Shelbi Durant.

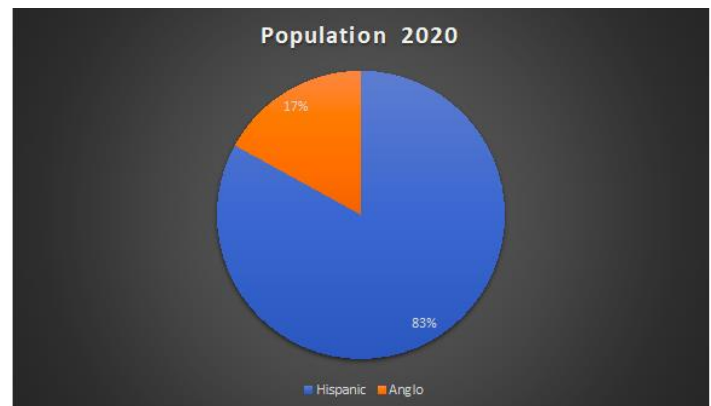
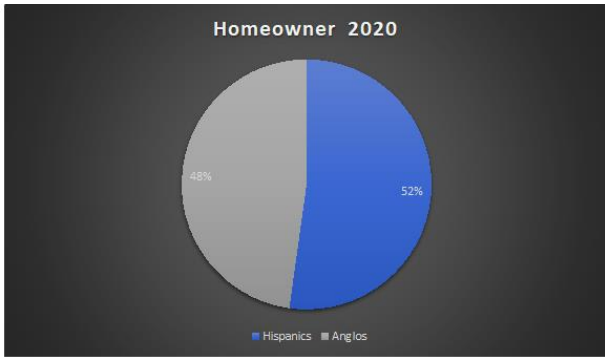


Figure 4. Made by Shelbi Durant. The pie chart shows the rapid change of race of the population of El Paso.



5. Mapping the Hispanic Homeownership gap. (2019, August 12). Urban Institute. <https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/mapping-hispanic-homeownership-gap> Made by Shelbi Durant.

A survey conducted among El Pasoans and Juarezenes by the Border Perception Survey along with the El Paso Community Foundation and Fundacion Comunitaria Frontera Norte showed that approximately one in every six El Paso residents owns homes on both sides of the border, in El Paso and Juarez. According to recent data from Urban Wire, Hispanics have a homeownership rate of 63.9% with a gap of 4.1% in relation to non-Hispanics. This points to another consideration for future El Paso homeowners trying to purchase a home. Less and less non-US born Hispanic are purchasing homes in El Paso. Studies show that in 2018 at least 60 % of Hispanic home buyers were born on US soil, and of the 40% born outside the US, more than half were US citizens. This shows the non-US born Hispanic population will continue to decrease as seen in Figure 4.

The City of El Paso Texas is full of history. The city is constantly changing and the way we live is shifting with the rapid growth of population. From being a predominantly white city in the 1940s with a “native-born white” population of 74.4%, this group has decreased to become the minority at a 17% (U.S. Census of 2020, see Figure 5). The minority of Mexican descent and Mexican immigrants first being at 22% grew to representing 83% of the population. The rapid change of pace of the city of El Paso has also affected the language we use for the definition of the colonias. They were initially referred to as “tenements,” the “barrios,” and lastly “colonias”. These changes in language can also be attributed to the rapid increase of population the city has endured (Figures 2 and 6). The exponential growth of the city has made it difficult for adults and Mexican immigrants to be able to afford a house. These issues may lead to a decrease in population of the white community in the long run or sooner.

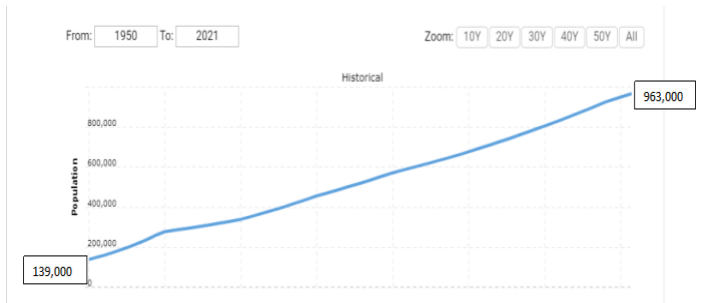


Figure 6. El Paso metro area population 1950-2021. (n.d.). Macrotrends | The Long Term Perspective on Markets. <https://www.macrotrends.net/cities/22980/el-paso/population> Made by Shelbi Durant.

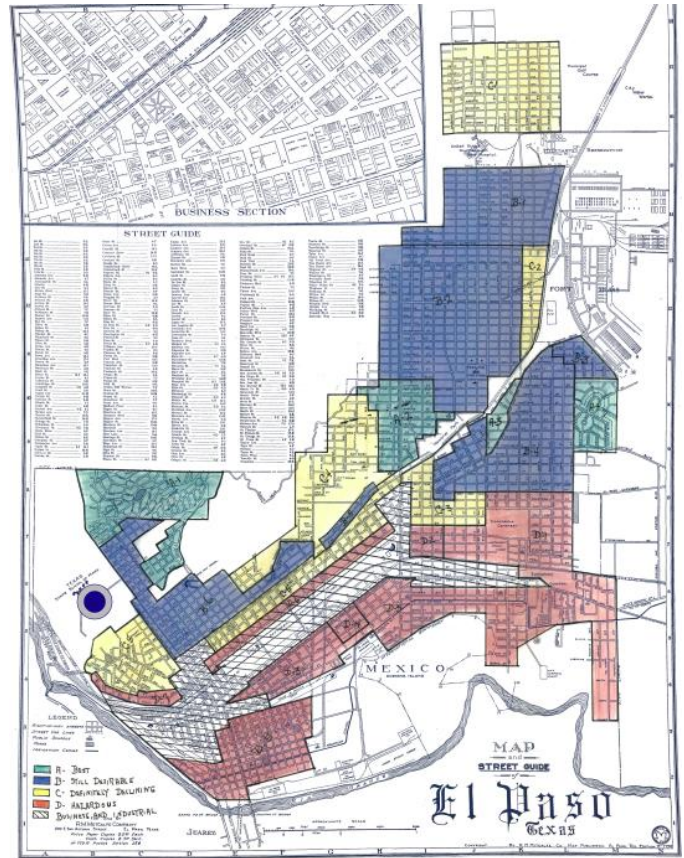


Figure 7: demonstrates the way the city was divided during the 1940s. Mapping Inequality. Dsl.richmond.edu. 2022. Mapping Inequality. [online] Available at: <https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/#loc=13/31.792/-106.512&city=el-paso-tx&adimage=2/40/-153.913> [Accessed 13 February 2022].



Figure 8. Taken by Paola Marquez. A brief example of the “tenements” now Colonias and the border.





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Stay tuned for our next issue!

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