

# The Seventh Generation

*In 1848, abolitionist leader Frederick Douglass condemned "...the present disgraceful, cruel, and iniquitous war with our sister republic. Mexico seems a doomed victim to Anglo Saxon cupidity and love of dominion."*

## Social Justice at the Borders

*Tom Angotti*

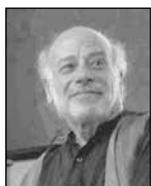
THE 2014 PLANNERS NETWORK CONFERENCE in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, held jointly with the Congreso Internacional de Planificación y Estudios Urbanos (International Congress on Planning and Urban Studies), highlighted the issues and problems of the divided transborder metropolis of Ciudad Juárez (Mexico) and El Paso (USA), places separated by an imposing border wall and checkpoints.

Our encounters in Ciudad Juárez highlight the serious consequences of having a militarized border dividing a large metropolitan region with economic and social ties that transcend the border. Urban planners need to speak out against the unjust consequences of U.S. border policies and call for more equitable economic, social and urban policies for this border region.

### Why Border History Matters

It is impossible to understand anything about the daily life of the people who live and work in the Ciudad Juárez/El Paso area without setting it in the larger context of economic, social and political inequalities in the U.S. and Mexico.

- The United States has the most powerful military in the world, which stands behind the biggest economy in the hemisphere. Since its westward expansion in the 19th century, the U.S. has predominated in its



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relations with Mexico. This included the capture of both indigenous and Spanish-held territories and a war with Mexico, which resulted in the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, events that were consistent with a wider expansionary vision that drove U.S. domestic and foreign policies. Throughout the 20th century, the U.S. backed military dictatorships and counterinsurgencies throughout Latin America, while Mexico often mediated between the nations to its north and south. By the end of the century, however, forces within Mexico allied with global capital and moved to dismantle the social welfare guarantees established by the Mexican Revolution.

- After the dramatic victories of the civil rights movement in the 1960s, President Richard Nixon launched the "war on crime." This became a rallying cry for a coordinated attack on black and Latino communities in the U.S. The "war on drugs" was a central part of this so-called war on crime, and resulted in the massive incarceration of young people of color while the majority of drug users, who are white, were largely left alone. The "war on drugs" went international as the U.S. financed counterinsurgency efforts under the guise of drug eradication and interdiction. To this day, the U.S. refuses to accept responsibility for reducing drug consumption or shift from its failed military strategies to one of reducing demand in the U.S., as proposed by many Latin American governments including Mexico.
- The 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement marked the triumph of neoliberal policies in Mexico. From the start it was an imbalanced agreement that gave the U.S. and Canada most of the

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need to be clear on the big picture, the ultimate objective, and shape immediate proposals to be transformative so that every proposal ends with what more is needed. In other words, all plans and proposals should be transformative and lead to the ultimate goals.

**Task 5: Joint U.S.–Mexico work.** For those of us in academia or connected with it, we should propose joint work between U.S. and Mexican planning schools and urban programs, joint statements of our professional associations (a policy statement formulated after this conference and signed by both sides might be a first step).

**Task 6: Go global.** We can help put urban issues back on the agenda of international NGOs and global institutions, where others at this conference have shown them to be virtually absent.

**Task 7: Look at some wild ideas!** We could really do a visioning exercise that imagined a single city comprising Ciudad Juárez and El Paso, with no borders between them. This could be a joint planning studio. It could propose how the city could be laid out, what uses encouraged, what regulated, how decisions could be made, people involved. It could look at what funds might be made available by the disappearance of the border. This may be a vision, perhaps a utopia, but it could make clear the cost of having the border. Another possible project could be to analyze the impact a minimum wage law in the state of Chihuahua might have on employment in the *maquiladoras*, and help a move towards the equalization of wages on both sides of the border. This could be an eye opener to wider alternatives. Also, we could study real estate transactions and prices, see what role they play in attracting businesses to Ciudad Juárez, see if real property taxes accurately capture the true value of real estate and are sufficient to meet the service needs created by new investment and suggest changes.

We do not as planners have much power, but neither are we powerless.



## 7th Generation: Social Justice at the Borders

By Tom Angotti

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economic benefits and led to substantial deficits for Mexico's urban and rural populations.

- In Mexico, “free trade” opened the door to powerful corporations from the North that flooded the Mexican market with cheap goods and drove many Mexican farmers and small producers out of business. Many of the displaced immigrated to the North, providing an abundant source of low-wage labor that lacked access to many services and basic human rights.
- With the contraction of the U.S. economy after the financial crisis of 2007, Mexican and other immigrants from Latin America faced an even more precarious situation and while some returned to their nations of origin, many stayed and faced a xenophobic, anti-immigrant climate that went from demonization and racial stereotyping to detention and forcible repatriation. Spurred on by a right-wing nativist campaign, documented and undocumented workers and their families became scapegoats for the ills of an ailing U.S. economy. In response to this situation, Planners Network issued a statement in 2010 in opposition to Arizona's draconian law that targeted immigrants ([www.plannersnetwork.org/2010/04/arizona-immigration-law/](http://www.plannersnetwork.org/2010/04/arizona-immigration-law/)).
- After the 2001 attack on the World Trade Center, U.S. immigration policies became even more heavily militarized than before. Along the border with Mexico, and at enormous expense, giant walls, buffer areas, surveillance equipment and heavily armed border guards became the norm. At the same time, changes in the geography of the drug trade and the ever-ineffective “drug war,” dramatically increased the level of violence and crime in Mexico and other Latin American countries. Ciudad Juárez became one of the most violent places. It became a battlefield that resulted in the kidnapping and murder of innocent people who became collateral damage. This included women and children on such a scale that many speak of *feminicide*, *youngenicide*, and *genocide* in Ciudad Juárez. The violence has ebbed in large part because of the grassroots organizing and resistance by residents, who reclaimed their city from the armed com-

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batants, and an often vicious government campaign. However, the larger forces driving the violence are still in play.

### Meaning of the border for planning and what planners can do

Ciudad Juárez and El Paso are two parts of a single metropolitan area sharply divided by the Mexico-U.S. border. Especially after NAFTA, capital transfers across the border became much more fluid as barriers to investment from the North were removed. Goods flowed more freely across the border as tariff barriers came down. However, no such freedom was allowed for labor. On the contrary, and particularly after 2001, labor faced more restrictions.

“Free trade” in practice, therefore, applies to goods and capital while labor has fewer freedoms. Mexico is the junior partner in NAFTA, and corporations in the U.S. and Canada get to take over Mexican markets while at the same time insuring for themselves low labor costs on both sides of the border. The unequal partnership is exemplified by the foreign-owned industries in Ciudad Juárez (known as *maquiladoras*) that pay low wages to Mexican workers who live in housing and communities lacking basic urban services in the periphery of the city. Every day thousands of higher-paid workers and managers commute from El Paso to Ciudad Juárez, highlighting the social divides reinforced by the border.

From the point of view of urban planning, the controls at the border – a 14-foot fence, surveillance cameras, sensors and patrols – are a major obstacle to the development of an efficient, effective and just metropolitan region. They affect the everyday lives of residents and workers on both sides, often negatively. The car and truck emissions at the border crossings affect air quality on both sides. The public health consequences and losses in productivity are of concern. Children who commute across the border to their schools also face much longer days. Every Mexican crossing the border, however, faces the possibility of detention and incarceration, and those who seek to evade the official crossings face the further possibility of injury and death at the hands of border patrols and vigilantes.

The Rio Grande river constitutes the international border, but a water treaty between the two countries continues to ignore severe problems of water supply and water quality in Ciudad Juárez. A more comprehensive regional solution that deals with water on both sides of the border is needed.

As Peter Marcuse noted in his keynote speech, there is a big difference between boundaries and borders. Boundaries are physical demarcations and lines on a map; borders divide communities and nations.

People everywhere have a right to the city, but when borders inhibit the exercise of these rights we need to reclaim these rights, advance a vision of borderless border metropolises, advance progressive planning cooperation across borders, join the movements for the protection of human rights for the border and immigrant populations, share our experiences and build support for more equitable cities.

Given the long legacy of the unbalanced relationship between the U.S. and Mexico, and the depth of the unjust economic and political relations between Mexico and its two powerful neighbors to the north, what can be done at the local level? How can planners in the U.S., Canada and Mexico engage these issues? How can planners in Ciudad Juárez and El Paso help to lay the groundwork for a more just metropolis?

These questions can help frame future collaborations and it is important that Planners Network play a role in stimulating them. P<sup>2</sup>

#### North American Organizations Promoting Trans Border Solidarity

##### IN THE U.S.

Immigrant Solidarity Network, <http://www.immigrantsolidarity.org/>

National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, <http://www.nnirr.org/drupal/>

National Immigration Law Center, [www.nilc.org/](http://www.nilc.org/)

##### IN CANADA

Immigrant Workers Centre, <http://iwc-cti.org>

No One is Illegal, <http://www.nooneisillegal.org>

Solidarity Across Borders, <http://www.solidarityacrossborders.org>