



Border Odyssey: Travels along the U.S./Mexico Divide

Charles D. Thompson Jr.

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"We were trying to change the vision and the conversation about border fears."

Border Odyssey takes us on a drive toward understanding the U.S./Mexico divide: all 1,969 miles—from Boca Chica to Tijuana—pressing on with the useful fiction of a map.

"We needed to go to the place where countless innocent people had been kicked, cussed, spit on, arrested, detained, trafficked, and killed. It would become clear that the border, *la frontera*, was more multifaceted and profound than anything we could have invented about it from afar."

Along the journey, five centuries of cultural history (indigenous, French, Spanish, Mexican, African American, colonist, and U.S.), wars, and legislation unfold. And through observation, conversation, and meditation, *Border Odyssey* scopes the stories of the people and towns on both sides.

"Stories are the opposite of walls: they demand release, retelling, showing, connecting, each image chipping away at boundaries. Walls are full stops. But stories are like commas, always making possible the next clause."

Among the terrain traversed: walls and more walls, unexpected roadblocks and patrol officers; a golf course (you could drive a ball across the border); a Civil War battlefield (you could camp there); the southernmost plantation in the United States; a hand-drawn ferry, a road-runner tracked desert, and a breathtaking national park; barbed wire, bridges, and a trucking-trade thoroughfare; ghosts with guns; obscured, unmarked, and unpaved roads; a Catholic priest and his dogs, artwork, icons, and political cartoons; a sheriff and a chain-smoking mayor; a Tex-Mex eatery empty of customers and a B&B shuttering its doors; murder-laden newspaper headlines at breakfast; the kindness of the border-crossing underground; and too many elderly, impoverished, ex-U.S. farmworkers, *braceros*, lined up to have Thompson take their photograph.

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Patrick Bergeron:

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