“The Shame Suicides”:
The Opportunity Cost of Borderlands Development between
The United States and Mexico in
The Early Twentieth-Century

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Abstract

The “Shame Suicides” brought into the public forum the tense borderlands relations between the United States and Mexico. To have functioning borderlands required mutual interests and cohesion between the two countries. What initially started out as a borderland functioning around mutual economic progress turned changed once Mexican industrial workers began frustrated with the level of American investment. The Mexican Revolution and changes to the Constitution which followed highlighted Mexico’s desire to prosper economically outside of American influence. However, Prohibition caused borderlands relations to be reinvigorated with the prospect of economic gain. Prohibition offered a chance for the borderlands economy to become resurrected. Mexico had gathered up a large amount of debt during the Revolution. Therefore, there was a need to stabilize the economy. The increase in potential revenue from tourism made it a tempting solution for President Obregon. By turning a blind eye to the vice activities which took place in Tijuana Obregon placed economic prosperity over moral values. This strictly contradicted the rest of his reforms which were taking place in Mexico at the same time, but there was a need for economic growth. During Prohibition the borderlands became a morally based boundary. The Peteet family represented the American tourists who went to Tijuana for the vice activities which were banned in America during Prohibition. However, the alleged kidnapping, rape and drugging of the Peteet daughters brought into the public spectrum the tense borderlands relations between the United States and Mexico. The peculiar nature of the Peteet family’s suicides caused it to become a media sensation even if similar events had happened before in Tijuana. The “Shame Suicides” created a variety of political, economic and moral questions about the nature of the border and who was to blame for the alleged crimes against the Peteet family. The “Shame Suicides” brought to attention the transition which the borderlands went from an area with mutual economic interest to one which represented a strict moral divide between the United States and Mexico.
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Introduction

On February 6th, 1926 Thomas M. Peteet, his wife Carrie and the younger of his two daughters were found dead in their house with the eldest daughter fighting for her life. Thomas Peteet’s co-worker Dan Conlogue went to the Peteet home as his friend had missed ‘so much work’ and when he opened the mailbox found two letters from Thomas Peteet. The first letter was directed to Dan Conlogue pleading, “Please deliver these letters at once. Have the police open the house. Beware of the gas.”¹ The second letter was a plea to private detective Captain Adamson whom Peteet addressed his affidavits to stating, “I and my family are of the best Southern blood. Death always was preferred than to dishonor our women. We are wiping it out tonight. Push this case, and if you can, have the government avenge our wrongs. We will appreciate it where we go, maybe.”²

When the police finally broke into the house through the windows they discovered the family in “the kitchen lying side by side upon neatly piled pillows and blankets” which was coined the “death couch.”³ The mother and youngest daughter were initially supposed asleep, but were lifeless and deadly cold. The father’s ‘constricted face gave evidence of his painful last moments; an unfired pistol lay by his hand.’⁴ The eldest daughter Clyde was barely alive frothing and unconscious on the kitchen floor. There was no evidence at the house for why the family committed suicide or why it was done in such a peculiar nature. The events which took place to the Peteet family became coined the “Shame Suicides” by the Los Angeles Times to add a

¹Vincent Cabeza de Baca and Juan Cabeza de Baca, “Journal of the Southwest,” Vol. 43, No. 4, Border Cities and Culture (Winter, 2001), 608.
³San Diego Union, February 7th, 1926
⁴Vincent Cabeza de Baca and Juan Cabeza de Baca, “Journal of the Southwest,” Vol. 43, No. 4, Border Cities and Culture (Winter, 2001, 608.
moral edge to the suicides. The only thing which possibly could have explained the death of the Peteet family was their recent five-day trip to Tijuana.

The Peteet family consisted of ‘Thomas Peteet (father), Carrie Peteet (mother), Clyde (eldest daughter) and Audrey (youngest daughter). The Peteet family lived in San Diego, California at the time of the suicides,’ but “claimed the finest Southern Blood from New Orleans, Louisiana.” Mr. Peteet and his family “originally lived in New Orleans, Louisiana, but moved to Mount Washington, Montana in 1919.” In Montana, the Peteet’s were well respected and seemed to be well thought of by those who knew the family. Thomas Peteet worked as a ‘sales agent for a Chicago slot machine company while his family remained in Montana.’ In 1925 their house in Montana was “destroyed by a fire which caused the family to move to San Diego – partly for the health of the mother.” The exact nature of the sickness was never made public because it would ‘have been improper to inquire about the nature of a lady’s illness.’ The Peteet’s seemed to resemble an upstanding Southern family with a father who was trying to provide for his loved ones. However, there were some obscure relationships within the dynamic of the family.

A strange feature of their history is that Mr. and Mrs. Peteet were divorced before either of their daughters was born. Mrs. Peteet was “married to a man called Durand. Clyde, the eldest daughter, was born of this marriage. Upon Durand’s death the widow remarried her former

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5 Los Angeles Times, February 11th, 1926
6 The Peteet family left for Tijuana on January 30th and returned to San Diego on February 4th 1926.
7 The suicides took place on February 6th, 1926.
8 Will of Thomas Peteet, February 5, 1926, County of San Diego, “Record of Wills,” vol. 15:299 #R3.5, Research Archives, San Diego Historical Society
10 Vincent Cabeza de Baca and Juan Cabeza de Baca, 608.
12 Vincent Cabeza de Baca and Juan Cabeza de Baca, 608.
husband and the daughter changed her last name to Peteet. Audrey, nineteen at the time of the suicide, was born after the re-marriage."\textsuperscript{13} Therefore, there were already some interesting dynamics within the Peteet family and perhaps the odd make-up of the family could help explain some of the events which took place during their trip to Tijuana. With the mother’s health a concern and their house burned to the ground in Montana, the Peteet family decided to move to warmer climates and chose San Diego, California. It was in San Diego where the Peteet family gained exposure and access to the border town of Tijuana.

On September 1925, the Peteet’s arrived in San Diego, California and ‘rented small house on 4423 Arch Street in the Hillcrest community.’\textsuperscript{14} The warmer climates and change of lifestyle benefited Carrie whose condition improved during their first few weeks in San Diego. Once his wife’s health began to show signs of improvement ‘Thomas opened a popcorn and peanut stand on December 9\textsuperscript{th}, 1925 in San Diego’s renowned Balboa Park.’\textsuperscript{15} His co-owner, Dan Conlogue, described Peteet as a “very honest and upright man. He was a very hard worker and never drank until his trip to Tijuana He seemed to be quite religious and would not work on Sundays.”\textsuperscript{16} The ‘middle-aged Peteet wore a dignified grey flannel suit on his long, lean frame and a hat on his balding head when in public.’\textsuperscript{17} Thomas Peteet had been a “doctor in New Orleans according to his daughters before he moved the family to Montana, but wanted a change in career to something more adventurous.”\textsuperscript{18} Peteet, according to his neighbors, did not drink and was a man who was “of the highest moral standard which he made sure his family followed.”\textsuperscript{19} Thomas Peteet appeared to resemble a model southern gentleman who was well put together and family

\textsuperscript{13} New York Times, The World, March 21\textsuperscript{st}, 1926
\textsuperscript{14} Vincent Cabeza de Baca and Juan Cabeza de Baca, 609.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid
\textsuperscript{16} San Diego Union, February 7\textsuperscript{th}, 1926
\textsuperscript{17} Vincent Cabeza de Baca and Juan Cabeza de Baca, 609.
\textsuperscript{18} New York Times, The World, March 21\textsuperscript{st}, 1926
\textsuperscript{19} Los Angeles Examiner, February 9th, 1926
orientated. He had sacrificed a successful career in Chicago as a salesman to move his family to San Diego. Therefore, one must assume that he cared deeply about the well-being of his family and that this was a priority to him as a father/husband.

Mrs. Peteet (Carrie) “appeared matronly, robust and genteel. The attractive daughters (twenty-six year-old Clyde and nineteen-year-old Audrey) studied classical music. Both daughters were musical, Clyde taking piano lessons and Audrey being a violinist.” Thomas’s passion for his daughter’s success in music was shown in his will where he left most of his property to his partner, but asked that the better of the violins be buried with Audrey. Neighbors believed that the Peteet family “was every bit as respectable as they appeared and presented a solid image of decent, God-fearing folks.” The Peteet’s were well liked by those who came across them and it seemed like they were enjoying their new life in San Diego. Thomas was running a successful business in a renowned part of San Diego, the children were developing their passion for music and his wife’s health was improving after the move. It appeared that everything was going well for the family and that they were settling into their new life in San Diego.

However, the family also had another potentially more devious side to them. Apparently ‘somewhat bored with life in San Diego and missing the friends they had known in Montana, the Peteet family was seeking adventure.’ Thomas Peteet worked in the vice industry as a slot machines salesman in Chicago before he moved to San Diego. During his dealings with slot machines it is possible that he grew an interest into gambling and vice activities which took place

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21 Will of Thomas Peteet, February 5, 1926, County of San Diego, “Record of Wills, vol.” 15:299 #R3.5, Research Archives, San Diego Historical Society
22 Vincent Cabeza de Baca and Juan Cabeza de Baca, 610.
23 Vincent Cabeza de Baca and Juan Cabeza de Baca, 609.
in his everyday dealings. However, Prohibition and his new job as a street vendor took him away from the exposure to such vice activities. Prohibition outlawed vice, but only eighteen miles south of San Diego was the infamous ‘Satan’s Playground’ Tijuana, Mexico. It was impossible to live in San Diego during the 1920’s and not be aware of the pleasure seeking activities which took place south of the border in Tijuana. Dan Conlogue, Thomas Peteet’s co-owner, had mentioned that the Peteet’s “intended to take a trip to into Mexico, to Ensenada, I believe.” Therefore, on January 30th, 1926 the Peteet family decided to make the short trip across the border to Tijuana, Mexico.

The Peteet family crossed the border on January 30th with the intent to enjoy vice activities which Tijuana possessed during Prohibition. When the Peteet family arrived and checked into their hotel the first thing they did was explore Revolution Avenue. For a family who cited boredom as their reason for going to Tijuana on a vacation, Revolution Avenue did not disappoint. The Peteet family took in the vice which Tijuana had to offer. The family “spent the remainder of the day eating, drinking, gambling, and carrying on in a manner unfit for polite society. Come evening, witnesses saw the family drinking excessively in shabby saloons on the infamous Revolution Avenue or at popular Agua Caliente.” The actions of the Peteet family while in Tijuana were typical of American crossing the border during Prohibition. In America, drinking and gambling were seen as ‘unmoral’ practices and were therefore prohibited from society. However, in Tijuana the vice industry was essential for the growth of the Mexican economy and therefore was accepted as part of daily life. There was a difference in what was

24 Vanderwood coined the term ‘Satan’s Playground’ to describe Tijuana.
25 During the 1920’s Tijuana benefited from Prohibition in the United States. Due to San Diego’s close proximity to the Mexican border and easy accessibility Tijuana/San Diego became closely linked socially, politically and economically.
26 San Diego Union, February 7th, 1926
27 Revolution Avenue was the red-light district of Tijuana during Prohibition.
28 San Diego Union, February 7th, 1926
deemed moral in the United States compared to Mexico. It was when enjoying the vice activities in Tijuana when the Peteet family allegedly experienced certain events which led them to committing suicide.

On a night out in Tijuana the Peteet family went to the “Oakland Bar wishing to hear some Hawaiian music.”29 Thomas Peteet described that once entering the Bar:

My daughters and I sat down at a table and we had some beer. The bar tender told me that one of them dancing was the Chief of Police and asked me if I would like to meet him and I said yes. He introduced him to us, and the Chief asked me if he could dance with my younger daughter and I said that he could. They danced and I bought a round of drinks and the Chief did the same. After I had taken that drink I remembered nothing until I found myself in bed in the hotel. It is my belief that I was drugged.30

The alleged drugging of the Peteet family at the Oakland Bar kick started a sequence of shocking events. In their respective dispositions, the Peteet daughters claimed that both of them were allegedly raped and kidnapped after drinking at the Oakland Bar. Once the family was reunited the following day they tried to seek legal justice for what had happened to them the night before. However, the Peteet family left Tijuana in a state of hysteria after they were unable to bring their alleged perpetrators to justice. When back in San Diego the Peteet family was still in shock from the events which took place to them in Tijuana. From what was meant to be a family vacation to spice up their ‘boring’ lives turned out to be a trip to Hell. The events which took place in Tijuana and the resulting suicides had borderlands repercussions for United States and Mexico relations.

The “Shame Suicides” brought into the public forum the tense borderlands relations between the United States and Mexico. While San Diego and Tijuana were only separated

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29 San Diego Union, February 7th, 1926
30 Thomas Peteet Disposition, February 5th, 1926, Bishop Collection # 88:17083, Research Archives, San Diego Archives, San Diego Historical Society
eighteen miles there were significant economic, social and political differences between the two cities. During the 19th century there was a mutual interest in the development of the borderlands economy and both countries were eager to build strong relations to promote economic growth. However, the media and political fallout from the “Shame Suicides” showed that this was not the case during Prohibition.

In my four sections I am going to examine why borderlands relations had changed between the United States and Mexico from a mutual interest in economic growth to the point where there was “closing the border between 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 a.m.”31 The transition away from borderlands based off of mutual interest in economic growth to one with nationalism and morality at its heart caused a change significant change in the culture. My argument will be based on showing what factors contributed to the change in borderlands relations and how the “Shame Suicides” highlighted the transition.

In my first section I will analyze how the development of transport networks and American investment affected borderlands relations between the United States and Mexico. The development of railways, trolleys and roads led to a boom in border towns. American investors were keen to capitalize on the growing borderlands economy. However, the increase in American investment was greeted with mixed reactions. The government created a “Zona Libre” which was meant to encourage American investment and foster an increase in Mexican exports. The wealthy American investors were happy to capitalize on this new capital venture, but the Mexican industrialist workers resented the changes. They were losing jobs and land to the American investors who were capitalizing on the Government’s encouragement to import their goods. The Mexican peasants’ resentment led to the Mexican Revolution which caused a

31 Los Angeles Times, February 19th, 1926
transformation in borderlands relations. The Constitution of 1917 encouraged an economy without foreign influence and moral reform programs to clean up the country after the Revolution. The Revolution reshaped the borderlands economic, political and social relations going into the 1920’s.

In my second section I will examine how Prohibition in American caused a change in borderlands relations. Prohibition reinvigorated the borderland culture. By banning vice activities in the United States there was a desire by Americans to access it elsewhere. Tijuana offered people the opportunity to enjoy the pleasures which were forbidden in the United States. While the rest of the Mexico was under moral reform policies, President Obregon gave Tijuana a free pass on the reform policy. Obregon’s reform policies were overridden in Tijuana because of the potential economic growth as a result of Prohibition in the United States. Tijuana therefore became a popular spot for American tourists looking to escape the moral reform policies’ in the United States and the Mexican economy benefitted as result.

In my third and fourth sections I will analyze how the “Shame Suicides” highlighted the change in borderlands relations between Mexico and the United States. The Peteet family represented the American tourists who went to Tijuana for the vice activities which were banned in America during Prohibition. However, the alleged kidnapping, rape and drugging of the Peteet daughters brought into the public spectrum the tense borderlands relations between the United States and Mexico. The peculiar nature of the Peteet family’s suicides caused it to become an American media sensation. The “Shame Suicides” created a variety of political, economic and moral questions about the nature of the border and who was to blame for the alleged crimes against the Peteet family. The divided moral outrage was emphasized in the build-up to the trial of those charged for the crimes against the Peteet daughters. The “Shame Suicides” brought to
attention the transition which the borderlands went from an area with mutual economic interest to one which represented a strict moral divide.
Section I: Transportation and American investment develops the region

Tijuana is located around eighteen miles south of San Diego and the journey to “Aunt Jane” was made both quick and easy by means of railroad, trolley and automobile busses during the 1920’s. The ‘busses ran every few minutes throughout the day and night’ and people were able to drive their cars to Tijuana through border patrol stops at the United States and Mexico border. When the Peteet family visited Tijuana they drove across the border using Old Highway 101 from San Diego. The Peteet family was able to travel to Tijuana because of the development of railroads, trolleys and roads which connected various cities together within the borderland and link them to places outside of the region.

The range which people travelled to Tijuana from the United States was vast. Old Highway 101 was ‘one of the first highways designated by the BPR (Bureau of Public Roads) in 1925 and stretched from San Diego up to the Canadian border.’ People were able to use highways like Old Highway 101 and railroads to travel down to the border from areas as far as the Canadian border. The transportation networks helped facilitate economic growth and potential further development into the borderland areas. The United States and Mexico both wanted the growth of the borderland and therefore shared a mutual interest in its expansion. This made the physical border seem less relevant. As the transportation networks continued to expand the amount of American investment in Mexican land increased as well. Due to the close proximity of Tijuana from the American border meant it was easy for the investors to visit the potential land to purchase. Therefore, the increase in transportation networks meant that the border was now

32 “Aunt Jane” is the direct English translation of Tijuana.
34 Old Highway 101 is now commonly referred to Historic Route 101 or US Route 101.
35 http://www.historic101.com/
easily accessible not only for tourism, but also for commerce and trading which kick started the growth of the Tijuana and Mexico border.

**Figure 1 - People exiting a train at the U.S.-Mexico border patrol in the U.S. 1915**

![Image of people exiting a train at the U.S.-Mexico border]

With the arrival of railroads in the late 19th century, the borderlands isolation was shattered. While many people had speculated about the border’s potential for mining and ranching, it was ‘only with the railroad that ranchers and miners were able to secure an easy way to move stock and ore to the markets.’ Providing a direct link to the US markets, railroads became the literal and figurative paths U.S. investment would follow into the region. They connected the borderlands to a broader capitalist economy and created pathways along which capital, laborers, and consumer goods moved. New Border towns emerged to serve businesses and soon became home to bi-national communities. As more people realized this, the borderland experienced

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36 Ticor Insurance Company, *People exiting a train near the U.S. inspection station at the U.S.-Mexico border* (San Diego, California: San Diego Historical Society, 1915)
nothing short of a capitalist revolution. The landscape of the borderland was very similar on the Mexican and American sides. There was little difference in the natural resources, environment and climate along the border between southern California and northern Mexico. Therefore, capital adventures such as ranching and mining were possible for investors looking into buying Mexican land along the border. The potential profits that could be made from buying land rich in natural resources and large cattle ranches attracted American interest. Coupled with the growth of the transportation networks connecting Tijuana to the United States meant that there was the potential for urban development along the borderland. Therefore, wealthy American investors began purchasing large amounts of land in Mexico as the borderland began to develop.

Figure 2 – Aerial view of Tijuana and southern California border

Two of the original men who invested in Mexicano real estate were California newspaper owners. Harrison Otis and later his son-in-law Harry Chandler were the owners of the Los Angeles Times. Otis owned newspapers and real estate in Los Angeles. With Chandler he

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38 Jimmy Erickson, Aerial view of border around Tijuana (Tijuana, Mexico: San Diego Historical Society, 1934)
39 Harry Chandler was editor of the Los Angeles Times during the time of the Peteet Suicides.
created the Colorado River Company in Mexico and then created the California and Mexico and Land Company to meet US laws.\textsuperscript{40} On the lands which the Otis-Gibson company owned in Mexico, activities banned in the United States were widespread. For example, ‘Chinese merchants operated establishments in Tijuana and Mexicali catering to Asians like the Casino Chino where gambling, liquor, opium and prostitution flourished-. Although the Otis-Gibson company controlled the land, it never hindered Chinese vice operations in its domain.'\textsuperscript{41} Otis had a financial interest in the development of the vice industry in Mexico as he was benefiting from the activities which took place in his lands. The interest in vice revenue from Mexican lands was also shared by his newspaper owner contemporary John D. Spreckels.

John D. Spreckels owned the ‘\textit{San Diego Union}’ as well as running a financial empire that included sugar factories, public utilities, ships, banks, hotels, railways and newspapers in Hawaii, San Francisco and San Diego.\textsuperscript{42} Spreckels ‘transformed San Diego and Tijuana into winter tourist centers. The jewel of his empire was the Hotel de Coronado, where wealthy guests enjoyed Casino Bar, a horse track and private, but illegal gambling.’\textsuperscript{43} Spreckels developed his empire from the United States to Tijuana further by buying and improving the local railroad systems on the Mexico and San Diego Border. Spreckels ‘planned to connect the San Diego rail lines to Yuma with concessions of the Mexican government to build over their territory.’\textsuperscript{44} The railroads constructions connecting the United States and Mexico attracted vice resulting in Tijuana becoming a major center for vice. Similarly to the Otis-Gibson Company, the ‘Spreckels’ companies never tried to stop border vice; indeed, the family lavished times, money

\textsuperscript{40} Vincent Zachary C. de Baca, "\textit{Moral renovation of the Californias: Tijuana's political and economic role in American-Mexican relations, 1920-1935}". Ph.D. diss., University of California, (San Diego, 1991), 35-36.
\textsuperscript{41} Vincent Zachary C. de Baca, "\textit{Moral renovation of the Californias: Tijuana's political and economic role in American-Mexican relations, 1920-1935}". Ph.D. diss., University of California, (San Diego, 1991), 36
\textsuperscript{42} De Baca Dissertation, 35.
\textsuperscript{43} De Baca Dissertation, 38.
\textsuperscript{44} De Baca Dissertation, 38.
and publicity on Tijuana for decades. The editors of the *San Diego Union* and *Los Angeles Times* were well aware of the economic gain which took place from investing in the Tijuana.

American dominance of the border was quite an achievement given that it was made difficult by Mexican Law. During the American-Mexican War of 1846-1848 there was a large amount of American troops in Mexico. The presence of the American troops ‘generated an unprecedented boom on the northeastern frontier. Merchants and speculators reaped handsome profits from supplying the armies of both Mexico and the United States.’ The border towns and Mexican merchants were able to take advantage of the American-Mexican War for their economic gain. However, after the fighting ceased ‘General Zachary Taylor’s occupation forces suspended the Mexican tariff, and for a short time imports entered the country duty free. As soon as the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was ratified in 1848, Mexico reinstated its tariffs.’ The tariffs proved out to be not popular with the merchants who planned to continue their business within Mexico after the American-Mexican War. During the American-Mexican War, the development of trade and commerce made the Tijuana-San Diego Borderland profitable to merchants. Hotels and restaurants began to spring up around the port of entry, a general merchandise store and post office on the U.S. side, while across the line ‘tourist curiosity created a patchwork of flimsy stalls and shops selling simple handcrafts like seashells and little horses fashioned from the long arms of tule cactus.’ For restaurants, one could taste a beer, crude tequila, or fiery mescal, and sample enchiladas, tacos and shrimp. Vendors aimed their ‘fare at callers who yearned to inch

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45 De Baca Dissertation, 38.
47 ibid
onto foreign soil, but dared not go much further.’ The Mexican merchants and landowners were developing the land based on foreign interest. Therefore, anything which would prevent people from trading or visiting the borderland would not be welcomed. Mexican merchants feared that excessive duties were so high that it made many goods practically prohibited. However, due to the development of the transportation networks there continued to be American interest in Tijuana despite of the increase in tariffs after the Mexican-American War.

Americans gained control of ‘vast acreages abutting the border in Mexico, despite the 1856 Federal Law that prohibited foreigners from owning land within twenty leagues (approximately sixty miles) of the nation’s border.’ The first crossing regulations stemmed from both nation-states’ desires to collect taxes on the growing stream of trans-border commerce. While there were political debates and variations within each nation, for the most part the United States kept the tariffs high to protect its expanding industrial and agricultural producers from foreign competition, while Mexico kept its tariffs comparatively low to encourage trade with the United States in hopes of bolstering its weak economy. As the official restriction on foreign ownership suggested, Mexicans had long worried that American economic involvement would pave the way for more intrusive forms of intervention or even annexation. However, at the same time most Mexican government officials, most notably President Diaz and his closest economic advisors realized the nation desperately needed to attract capital.

During the period of 1876 to 1910 when President Diaz was in power, the Mexican government made attracting foreign investment a priority. The blessing of the Mexican President

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Diaz for American investment not only caused there to be a growth in the border towns such as Tijuana, but also the American ownership within Mexico. In ‘1884, believing that high tariffs were hindering the economic development of the northern frontier, the Mexican government expanded its free-trade zone, or Zona Libre, meaning that American goods could be imported duty free along the border to as far west as the Pacific Ocean. The Zona Libre had only previously been ‘along the Tamaulipas border towns whose district had important social, economic and political ties in the United States and Mexico.’ However, on ‘March 25, 1884, the Mexican Congress voted to extend the Zona Libre to the Pacific Ocean.’ The free zone was a boom for local commerce, but it crippled the development of industry along the border. Reduced import duties made it cheap to move goods into the Zona Libre, but with export duties applying to goods moving both back across the border to the United States and into the interior of Mexico, exportation was very expensive.

By 1900, despite economic progress, Diaz faced opposition from the middle-class elites in the north of Mexico who faced foreign domination of the economy. They believed that the ‘Diaz government, in promoting foreign investment, had deprived them of their share of the prosperity.’ However, on the opposite of the border Americans were also displeased with Diaz’s economic policy. From ‘1880-1900 the rate of profits in the United States dropped thirty percent on exports and from 1900-1910 the rate continued to decrease by another fifteen

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51 The Zona Libre, a Mexican free trade zone along the international border, was established in 1858 to counteract the highly favorable trade conditions enjoyed by American border towns.
52 St. John, 97.
53 Samuel E. Bell and James M. Smallwood, Zona Libre: Trade & Diplomacy on the Mexican Border 1858-1905, “Arizona and the West,” Vol.24, No.2 (Summer, 1982), 120.
54 Ibid, 142.
percent.  

Most American businessmen ‘vehemently opposed the extension as the Free Zone would allow the free importation of merchandise into Paso Del Norte would greatly increase opportunities. Unequal competition with Mexican merchants would paralyze commerce in El Paso.’

Some argued that the expansion of the Zona Libre would ‘help provide a larger market for American products.’ There was also the argument that due to economic troubles at home that being able to invest in Mexico could benefit Americans. ‘In the last twenty years of the nineteenth century, confronted with rising labor unrest and higher costs at home, American capitalists sought relief in foreign investment. In 1900 one half of all American foreign investments were in Mexico.’ Therefore, the Zona Libre did offer potential economic benefits and negatives considering which side of the borderland you lived.

Despite the boom which Mexican merchants, the economy and land owners experienced during the Zona Libre it came at a cost. Perhaps influenced by the growing discontent by American and Mexican merchants/government officials on ‘July 1, 1905 President Diaz abolished the Zona Libre, hoping to make the border less dependent on imports and to promote agricultural and industrial development.’ President Diaz hoped that by ‘abolishing the Zone Libre in 1905 would help pave the way for improved relations between the United States and Mexico in the early twentieth century.’ The end of the Zone Libre allowed American investors to continue to pump money into the developing border towns of Mexico, but now not have to pay any tariffs.

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58 Hart, 143.
59 Hart, 178.
60 St. John, 73.
Wealthy American investors now had a lot of money tied up in Mexico and therefore wanted to ensure that their businesses were profiting. Hence, there was a boom in the border-town economies and in particular Tijuana. American investors were able to finance the boom in Tijuana because of the safeguards put in place during the latter part of the nineteenth century. A young American correspondent for the San Diego Union described Tijuana on a visit during the initial boom of Tijuana under the rule of Mexican President Diaz:

Even in 1889, there were more saloons in Tijuana than buildings... Some are in tents, open in the front, with a counter in the center and empty beer barrels for seats. There were so many Mexicans with their ponchos and serapes seated on their haunches. I told myself, ‘My God, this is a desolate place.’ It was desolate perhaps, but oh, so exotic.  

Similarly, the Los Angeles Times during the initial boom of Tijuana described the streets in a similar way to the San Diego Union two years previously:

Noting that most tourists he saw seemed to be middle-income people-babbits from the Midwest. They either have their sorrows to drown or pleasures to accelerate in a way that is relatively difficult and expensive and sometimes socially inexpedient at home. The more one frequents at the Mexican border resorts, the more one is brought to realize that the great American gift for depravity is for playing devilish rather than being it. The real thing, obviously, and always sought in a border debauch, is to carry the memory of from two to nine drinks back to some town like Coon Rapids or Memphis, and be able to say at the next gathering of cronies or lodge brother: Lemme tell you. Tijuana is some to raise hell in, and boy, we sure raised it.”

Trans-border businesses relied on a bi-national network of government officials, investors and professionals. The support of Mexican officials was critical to American’s ability to invest and build businesses across the border line. Americans and other investors came to rely on these officials not for their initial generosity, but to help them maintain and grow their businesses and

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62 San Diego Union, March 2nd, 1889
63 Throughout my Thesis there are spelling, grammar and punctuation errors in primary sources which I am using. Instead of correcting errors I am leaving them in their original form to reflect the authors exact few and representation of their views.
64 Vanderwood, 87.
negotiate political and economic businesses. As American investment in Mexico increased, a ‘growing number of Capitalists became experts in purchasing land, securing a title, and transacting business across the border.’ Investors were assisted by specializing professionals, including attorneys, custom brokers, and title investigators, who facilitated trans-border trade and helped guide them through the unfamiliar provisions of Mexican Law. However, the dynamic of American intervention changed significantly when the Mexican Revolution took place from 1910-1920. The Mexican revolution changed relations with the United States and altered the borderland culture.

The Mexican Revolution played a crucial role in the development of borderland. Under the rule of President Diaz, Mexico’s economy was able to grow at a rapid rate. By attracting foreign investment by making exports attractive for Americans, there was a boom in the border towns and subsequently increase the growth of the Mexican economy. However, this growth came at a cost. Mexico’s economic growth had been driven primarily by expansion of the export economy ‘based on strong overseas demand for minerals, cotton, henequen and other commodities.’ After the turn of the nineteenth century, the falling demand for these products in the industrialized nations exposed the vulnerability of the economy dependent on overseas imports. The working class was the most affected by the fall in demand for exports and the increase in American investment at the turn of the nineteenth century. ‘Tens of thousands of them had lost their land to modernized estates bent on increasing the acreage of highly priced commercial crops such as sugarcane, cotton, and henequen, while their capacity to grow food

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65 St. John, 83.
crops diminished.’ Land consolidation, rising food prices and exacerbated by population increases created great poverty in some of the regions. To help match the increase in demand for exports there was a ‘growing number of industrial workers, miners, railroad hands, textile workers. However, the workers resented receiving half the wages that foreign workers were paid for the same work. They also suffered injury imprisonment or death at the hands of soldiers and police when they attempted unions or were to strike.’ In the ‘copper mines, textile mills, oil fields and railways – owned by foreigners- the proletariat slaved thirteen hours away for centavos.’ Mexican workers felt that the Diaz government supported the interests of foreign workers and corporations over those of native labor and capital.

President Diaz tried to modernize the Mexican economy, but it came at a tremendous cost in human suffering. The revolutionary call to arms marked the culmination of liberal political critiques that had been mounting over the course of Diaz’s campaign. The oppression of the Mexican working class, appeasement to wealthy American investors and dictatorship methods of government meant that during the election in 1910 there was hope a more liberal ruler to succeed Diaz. However, when Diaz chose ‘Ramon Coraral, the race murderer of the Yaqui Indians, a man who was feared by both factions’ there was uproar. Francisco Madero, who was leader of the local industrialists, called for there to be a revolution against the newly elected President and his government.

The Mexican Revolution changed the dynamic of the borderlands. There was disruption in the transport networks which played a vital role in the growth of the Mexican economy. The

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68 Gonzales, 62.
70 Gonzales, 17.
constant battle for supremacy amongst different political groups led to there being concern over the future of trade relations with the United States. Wealthy American investors had a lot of land in Mexico and ‘were pressing for government intervention which outraged the Mexicans.’ However, the Americans never invaded or raised arms against the Revolutionists and did not impose trade barriers against Mexico during the War. The vulnerability of Mexico would have made an invasion perhaps appealing. However, once the United States joined the Allies in World War I it seemed unlikely that any act of violence against Mexico was going to take place.

By 1917, Mexico ‘waivered over the abyss: almost two million people had died, paper money choked the economy, the mines were empty, haciendas laid in ruins, the army pushed civilians around at gunpoint, the Church spread ignorance and a few big owners still held most of the land.’ Therefore, there was a need for a truce and an alteration in the Constitution. The Constitution of 1917 was a program of social change which would outlaw the practices which took place under the rule of President Diaz. The Constitution was meant to promise the Mexican people that in their struggle for a new order, one which they could count on the government for help. However, the Constitution was not well received in the United States.

Under article 27 of the Constitution, ‘all privately owned lands, waters, and resources became subject to appropriation or nationalization as necessary for public interest.’ Mexican citizens began to move onto the vast American owned properties abutting the boundary line in anticipation that the Mexican government would revoke American titles. American landowners were distraught with the new law in the Mexican Constitution. U.S.-Mexican relations reached a

\[71\] St. John, 132.
\[72\] Gonzales, 34.
\[73\] St. John, 131.
low point and even though the lands were not nationalized or reposed the Constitution still soured relations.

The rise of nationalism which took place during the Revolution highlighted Mexico’s desire to function as a democratic state separate from foreign investment. The development of the borderland went through a down period and there was a decrease in American investment in Mexico. The United States put up a literal boundary between the two countries by building fences in response to the Constitution. The fences signified the fact that the border was not just where two nations met, but where two nations were divided. They would ‘become not only the most powerful visual representations of the twentieth century border, but would also increasingly be seen as the sense of disparity and distrust between the United States and Mexico.’ There was a period of calm after the Constitution on the borderland development and trade. However, American Prohibition reinvigorated the development and build upon the transportation networks created to facilitate the initial growth of the borderland.

74 St. John, 131.
Section II: Prohibition remakes the “borderlands”

Prohibition was the major turning point for the development of the vice and tourism industry on the San Diego/Tijuana border. The Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution became more commonly known as ‘Prohibition’ and came into effect on January 16th, 1920. Approved by Congress in 1917 the Eighteenth Amendment ‘forbade the manufacture, sale, or transportation of intoxicating liquors and provided Congress and state legislatures with authority to enact enforcing measures.”75 By January 1919, ‘forty-six of the forty-eight states had ratified the amendment with only Connecticut and Rhode Island withholding their assent from accepting the Amendment.”76 In the over ‘200 years of the U.S. Constitution, the 18th Amendment remains the only Amendment to ever have been repealed.’77

The Eighteenth Amendment was caused by the buildup of protest by the ‘Anti-Saloon League’78 who was part of the growing Progressive Era movements. The Progressive Era represented a potential overhaul of American Society during the first of the 20th century. The combination of Progressive thinking and World War I provided the ideal opportunity to enact national alcohol Prohibition. The ‘league provided both a clear objective (the end of saloon) and the organizational so that a coalition of evangelical Protestants, Women, professional organizations, and commercial interests take advantage of this opportunity.’79 The Anti-Saloon

77 On March 22, 1933, President Franklin Roosevelt signed an amendment to the Volstead Act known as the Cullen-Harrison Act, allowing the manufacture and sale of "3.2 beer" (3.2% alcohol by weight, approximately 4% alcohol by volume) and light wines. This Act effectively ended Prohibition in the United States and was met with immense public support
78 The Anti-Saloon League was the leading organization lobbying for Prohibition in the United States in the early 20th century. They were a key component of the Progressive Era, and was strongest in the South and rural North, drawing heavy support from pietistic Protestant ministers and their congregations, especially Methodists, Baptists, Disciples and Congregationalists.
League was able to make their case heard on a national level by using propaganda to show the American people what the dangers of alcohol or what is more important to society. In the figure below we see a piece of propaganda from the Anti-Saloon League which used World War I to help gain support.

**Figure 3 – Anti Saloon Movement Propaganda**

![Propaganda Image]

To ensure that Prohibition would be enforced when it was brought into effect on January 16th, 1920 Congress passed the Volstead Act, also known as The National Prohibition Enforcement Act. The National Prohibition Enforcement Act was devised by ‘Wayne S. Wheeler, who was Chairman of the Anti-Saloon Club, but named after Andrew Volstead of Minnesota, who presented it to the house.’

On October 28th, 1919 the Volstead Act was passed in the House by ‘287 votes to 100 and in the Senate without a roll call on October 27th, 1919, over Woodrow Wilson’s veto who did not want to break his wartime Prohibition laws.’ The Volstead Act set down methods of enforcing the Eighteenth Amendment, and defined which

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82 Cashman, 24.
intoxicating liquors were prohibited, and which were excluded from prohibition such as for medical and religious purposes or for possession or use of alcoholic beverages in private homes with legally acquired alcohol. The figure below shows how people were able to sell alcohol without breaking the Eighteenth Amendment as people were allowed to sell alcohol for sacramental purposes, and in this example Kosher Alcohol is being sold legally.

Figure 4 – Kosher Wine

The Volstead Act was created with the intent to make sure that Prohibition was upheld and that police officers, special agents and the general public knew what broke the Eighteenth Amendment. Those who chose to try and break the Eighteenth Amendment were made perfectly aware of the potential punishments they may face if found guilty. While there were potential loopholes to try and consume/produce alcohol such as for sacramental purposes as shown with the kosher wine, most of the population had to go without alcohol all together. The lack of alcohol available to Americans caused there to be a significant increase in bootlegging and crime involving alcohol production. Criminal lords like Al Capone were able to take advantage of the

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83 http://marymiley.files.wordpress.com/2012/05/kosher-wine1.jpg
high demand for alcohol during Prohibition and became national icons/villains for their bootlegging of alcohol.

National Prohibition had spawned an enormous crime web of opportunists throughout the country. ‘Bootleggers became a profession and past time. It was generally accepted, if not always true, that when liquor deals were made, officers took payoffs to glance the other way, through the authorities did make occasional headline-grabbing raids in minor offenders to satisfy moralists, ministers, and politicians. Most Americans shrugged their shoulders and called it a sign of the good times.’

However, for those not willing to break the law they were left thirsty for the forbidden alcohol and had to abide by the law. The Volstead Act emphasized that law enforcements was very serious about making sure Prohibition was upheld.

Prohibition forced Americans to look elsewhere to obtain alcohol and the ‘saloon’ atmosphere which were forbidden to them in the United States. The saloon was the natural target of the prohibition forces and arguably one of the primary social scenes which were deemed unacceptable prior to prohibition. The saloon served as ‘a variety of functions of the poor, working and immigrant classes. There they found comfort, entertainment, games and political discussion and much more. The saloonkeeper was the friend, confidant, and political leader of his regular customers. The reputation of the saloon became tarnished, however, through its association with widespread corruption, criminal activity, and vote-buying and monopoly power.’

Prohibition forces focused on this crime-ridden industry that was capable of corrupting both the political leadership of the country and the lives of the poor immigrants. One could argue

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84 Vanderwood, 12.
85 Thornton, 54.
that the drive behind the ‘success of Prohibition depended on ridding America of the saloon’. Therefore, with Prohibition and the Volstead Act limiting the ability for Americans to enjoy the saloon lifestyle legally there was a great incentive to find a way to match the growing demand for vice and alcohol.

The Anti-Saloon movement was successful in preventing Americans from enjoying the saloon atmosphere in the United States, but could not prevent them from looking outside of the United States for vice and alcohol. Businessmen who had made profits out of the saloons in the United States were now looking for other ways to invest their capital and ways to avoid the Volstead Act. With businessmen and common folk looking for places to enjoy the saloon lifestyle which now they were forbidden to enjoy by law, there was a desire to find a place which could meet their needs. Tijuana became the answer. Therefore, “Tijuana became the spot for Americans seeking to quench their thirst and enjoy the raunchy saloon environment they craved to find during Prohibition.”

The movement of vice from the U.S. to the Mexican border was the result of the legal significance of the boundary line. Although the ‘reformers in Mexico and the United States had similar concerns about drinking, gambling, drug use and prostitution, their governments adopted different strategies for regulating these vices.’ The Mexican government chose to register and tax vice purveyors, while the U.S officials completely outlawed gambling, prostitution, and the sale of drugs and alcohol. The first attempt of moral reform in Mexico came from ‘President Venustiano Carranza, who, in 1917, ordered the initial moralization campaign, which prohibited drug trafficking, bullfights, cockfights, the national lottery and other gambling around Mexico

86 Thornton, 55.
88 St. John, 152.
President Carranza’s reform policies were based off of the 1917 Constitution. The Constitution aimed to bring an end to the old dictatorship rule which took place under President Diaz and bring in a new liberal government to please the masses. The rise of Nationalism during the Revolution caused there to be a desire to shift away from economic reliance on foreign investment and instead on promoting growth in local agriculture, mining and cattle ranching.

The constitution program was a ‘social pact among four revolutionary currents: the liberal business community, the bureaucratic professional elite, the rural masses demanding land, and the radical industrial workers – a pact that would hold for decades.’ However, even before capitalism had a chance to develop and become the dominant sector of the economy, it was threatened by controls and restrictions of the new Constitution. The 1917 Constitution ‘was not to Carranza’s liking; thus he refused to implement it.’ While the violence may have stopped after the 1917 Constitution, the social reform that was promised did not take place. Therefore, President Carranza was under pressure from his rival Populist leader Obregon to implement the reform policies which were promised during the Constitution. Obregon had the support of the masses and once it became clear that President Carranza was not going to act on the reform policies which were promised; drastic action had to be taken.

President Venustiano Carranza’s was assassinated by supporters of Obregon in April 1920. Obregon was sworn into power and his reign became known as a ‘political revolution under a populist.’ While President Carranza was able to broker peace during the Revolution War, he chose not to implement the social pacts of the Constitution. However, Obregon

89 De Baca Dissertation, 71.
90 Gonzales, 35.
91 Hodges and Gandy, 41.
92 Hodges and Gandy, 37.
promised to ‘embrace the social pact and enforce the Constitution’ unlike his predecessor.\(^{93}\) He introduced reforms that were targeted to ‘slay the military dragon, tame the clerical monster and finish the fattened aristocracy.’\(^{94}\) The reforms were able to help turn Mexico into a functioning democratic state. However, President Obregon had to take into account the state of the economy when applying the reforms. While he was able to carry out reforms on the church, military and aristocracy the dire state of the economy had to be addressed. Therefore, once Prohibition took place in the United State Obregon was offered an opportunity to capitalize on the potential tourism along the borderlands.

Prohibition offered Obregon the opportunity to fix the crushing fiscal debts that confronted the nation after the Revolution. The Mexican government made ‘slogans that sold Mexico as a vacation destination and encouraged Americans over the radio and in print to become friends with their southern neighbor.’\(^{95}\) There was a keen desire from the Mexican government to improve relations with the United States on an economic front and therefore were willing utilize the vice industry to lure Americans south of the border into Mexico again. However, balancing the increase in potential tourism and sticking to the moral reform policies was going to be a challenge. One of the main causes of the Revolution was to get rid of foreign investment and to promote the growth of an industrial worker based economy. Therefore, Obregon had to manage the amount of foreign influence in Mexico as a result of Prohibition while still carrying out his moral reforms on the church, military and aristocracy. The potential boom in the borderland economy proved too great for Obregon and eventually he sanctioned vice

\(^{93}\) Hodges and Gandy, 41.
\(^{94}\) ibid
\(^{95}\) Andrew Grant Wood and Dina Berger, *Holiday in Mexico: critical reflections on tourism and tourist encounters* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 7
activities to take place in Tijuana. Publically, President Obregón’s regime (1920-1924) banned vice yet Mexico City issued permits to Tijuana. To ‘protect the millions of dollars in American cash that flowed to Tijuana, Mexico City limited vice concessions to foreigners who proved themselves trustworthy and capable of avoiding scandalous excess.’\textsuperscript{96} The Mexican government was ridden with debt and Prohibition offered a great source of revenue. American tourists crossing the border to enjoy vice activities during Prohibition were essential to aiding the recovery of the Mexican economy. While the rest of Mexico was experiencing moral reforms and prohibiting vice activities, Tijuana was getting a free pass due to the potential economic gain which vice could give the Mexican economy.

Mexican border towns became the easiest place to get a drink along the border. Each new law restricting gambling, prostitution, and prize fighting in the United States spurred the growth of border activities. Vice districts developed in every city along the border, but Tijuana became the exemplar of border vice. In ‘1900 less than 400 people lived in the vicinity of Tijuana where a few merchants and tourism promoters catered to local ranchers and American sightseers who wanted to see the border’\textsuperscript{97} However, during the 1920’s Tijuana developed a substantial and diversified vice economy. Between ‘1920 and 1924 the number of saloons in Tijuana doubled from thirty to sixty.’\textsuperscript{98} By the time of their ill-fated visit in 1926, the Peteet’s would have had many bars besides Oakland Bar to choose from in Tijuana. Even the American heavyweight boxer, ‘Jack Johnson, operated two Tijuana nightclubs, although one, which catered strictly to blacks, would have been off limits to the Peteet’s.’\textsuperscript{99} Along the ‘main tourist street in downtown Tijuana, saloons with inviting names like El Caballito, the Klondike, and the Black Cat doubled

\textsuperscript{96} De Baca Dissertation, 72.
\textsuperscript{97} St. John, 159.
\textsuperscript{98} Vanderwood, 163.
\textsuperscript{99} St. John, 162.
in number from thirty to sixty in four years. As a drawing card, the Alhambra Occidental advertised ladies restroom with maid in attendance. Ladies restrooms were not lavatories. They had no toilets. They were plush parlors with comfortable chairs and lounges where women, attended by maids, could read and rest, or freshen their perfume from imported stock or escape unwanted male attention.’

Tijuana was quite different from the United States and Mexico during Prohibition. Tijuana became the place where average Americans were able to enjoy pleasures which were forbidden to them by in the United States.

New York Times reporter, Stephen Chambers, surveyed the panorama of Tijuana for his paper’s Arts and Entertainment section on June 6th 1920. The article describes a visit to Tijuana during Prohibition and the aura which it had to offer to Americans looking to cross the border:

South from San Diego Cal, there runs a road. It is not a straight road, nor is it narrow. Broad and crooked, it winds a more or less serpentine way to Tijuana, across the international line in Old Mexico…. Against the paving of that road, against smoothing out the ruts in the transgressor, the clergy of the Sunshine City have thundered protest, and to that road to Tijuana that pulpit has given a name, which to the joy of the irreverent, had stuck – ‘The Road to Hell’

The wickedness has a charm of its own and human nature was not changed by the Volstead Act, the auto-stage companies and the livery companies and livery stables of San Diego and Los Angeles are sowing a whirlwind and reaping a harvest. They do not have to advertise the particular route- all who visits Tijuana must “do” Tijuana. Imagine a wide main street after the old Western Style or Spanish Plaza of colonial pueblos. On either side is a succession of saloons, dance halls, movie picture barns, and gambling places. In other places, not so largely advertised, one may cook a pill (smoke opium) or otherwise dally through the lotus hours. The air reeks of dust, warm humanity, toilet perfume, stale tobacco and that curious congenial aroma which makes the camel twitch his nostrils afar. The welkin rings and vibrates with laughter and chatter of abnormal good spirits, the noise of an occasional fracas, the whirl of the roulette wheel, the clatter of little white ball seeking its owners salvation, the musically liquid swixkety-swish-swish of the American cocktail, the tap-tap-tap of hammers where joy places are being shot up overnight to accommodate the business of this Prohibition.

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100 Vanderwood, 163.
101 A nickname for San Diego
But along the way about five in the evening there is usually a rush for the line before dark, as the crazy bridge must be negotiated, and one by one the cars are halted at United States Customs for search. As frequent from 500-1000- oh, sometimes more- automobiles from the United States are parked like a mass of black beetles at Tia Juana, your chances of getting back into San Diego are slim. You are halted in that narrow alley, which is the only official entry and exit point. You are requested to step out of the car- ladies too- sometimes ladies in particular. An urbane official, while perhaps smiling at the possible faint exhalation of ambrosia (alcohol), deftly runs in the hands over your clothing, perhaps lighting (lifting) your hat for you, if it happened to have a high crown (in which people sometimes smuggle goods), while another officer open up the hood of the car, sounds the radiator, studies the tires, peeps into the horn, removes cushions, investigates the tool box and even examines the spark plugs, or peers under the rubber matting in search of opium (Regulations permitted each traveller only one package of goods in that form of a personal belongings.) Hence, the “package” is frequently as much as a single man can carry unassisted. Then, if your bail in clean, you can go ahead, free to enter a respectable republic. Once there, the traveler is met by the billboard “Road to Hell” which points at the sinner with a kind of goading insolence and cries: “Do Not Attempt to Bring Liquor into the United States.”

Stephen Chamber’s description showed what Tijuana had to offer to the American’s during Prohibition. While being sensational at times, the article highlights the pleasures which to the Peteet family would have encountered when visiting Tijuana in 1926. President Obregon sanctioned these activities and vice districts to exist because of the revenue which they were generating for the Mexican economy. Even though outside of the borderlands moral reform was being implemented and enforced, Tijuana was given an exception. President Obregon’s moral reform policies were overridden in Tijuana for economic interest in the border towns. Therefore, those people who were calling for the Mexican Revolution and foreign intervention to leave Mexico were left distraught. Not only had American investors come back into Mexico, but the government once again was willingly letting the Americans cross the border/invest in Mexican land. During the Constitution of 1917 and the Zona Libre there were protests for American investors to leave the borderlands, but they were no back in a force larger than ever before during Prohibition. Therefore, when leaving San Diego to go to Tijuana they were able to see a different

102 New York Times, June 6th, 1920
type of life available to them then in the United States. The newspapers in the United States were able to portray a view of Tijuana which would have seemed like a completely different world to families like the Peteets. Fueled by what Tijuana had to offer and the lack of vice available in San Diego, the Peteet family crossed the border ‘somewhat bored with their life in San Diego.’

103 Vincent Cabeza de Baca and Juan Cabeza de Baca, 603.
Section III: The Peteets Partying: The Morality of Modern life

On January 30th, 1926 the Peteet’s left their house in San Diego and went on a family vacation. According to their neighbors the ‘Peteet’s were somewhat bored with their life in San Diego and missing their friends in Montana.’

Thomas Peteet’s co-worker, Dan Conlogue, claimed that with his last conversation with Thomas before he left San Diego said he “intended to take a trip to Mexico, Ensenada I believe.”

The Peteet family did decide to go to Mexico, but rather than Ensenada they chose to go to Tijuana. Tijuana was located only eighteen miles from San Diego and was easily accessible by cars or trolleys. Figure 3 below shows a photo of the Peteet’s home in San Diego which was located at 4423 Arch Street in the Hillcrest community. It was from this house that the Peteet’s left the United States on their vacation to Tijuana to add some spice to their “boring” lives in San Diego.

Figure 5– Peteet House in San Diego

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104 Vincent Cabeza de Baca and Juan Cabeza de Baca, 603.
105 San Diego Union, February 10th, 1926
106 The Peteet Family Household. (Courtesy of the San Diego Historical Society – Ticor Collection)
Benefitting from the ‘close proximity to the booming populations in San Diego and Los Angeles, Tijuana was popular with both average Americans, like the Peteet’s, and celebrities and mobsters.’ Americans were the most heavily represented among the consumers of vice in Tijuana during Prohibition. United States border vice districts were entirely dependent on Americans ‘who crossed the boundary line to visit saloons, casinos, brothels, and race-tracks.’ The ‘United States Department of Tourism stated that during the peak of Prohibition in 1929 that ninety five percent of the money spent in such resorts in Tijuana were from America citizens.’ The boom of tourists crossing the border to Tijuana would have pleased Obregon and help the struggling Mexican economy recover. However, many of the resorts, casinos, brothels and race tracks were owned by wealthy American investors. The Mexican government received a percentage of the profits generated by the vice industries owned by Americans, but the workers were still largely under the employment of foreigners. Those people living in Tijuana who were in support of the Revolution and the Constitution of 1917 would have been outraged by the increase in American intervention in the Mexican economy. Prohibition reinvigorated the borderlands economy, but at the same time brought back the negative feelings towards the American investors for intervening in capital adventures. Therefore, when the Peteet family crossed the border looking for the vice activities which were prohibited in the United States, they were walking into an area where not everyone was in favor of American tourists.

It was these sorts of activities which the Peteet family would have been searching for to rid themselves of their “boredom” in Tijuana. Thomas Peteet when working in Chicago worked as a slot machine salesman while his family was living in Montana. His career switch to being a

107 St. John, 216.
108 St. John, 217.
109 St. John, 216.
street vendor perhaps wanted him to spice things up in his life. When selling slot machines before Prohibition he would have been exposed to the vice and gambling which took place in Tijuana. By taking a trip to Tijuana Thomas Peteet perhaps wanted to bring back the excitement he had in his life when being a slots machine salesman prior to Prohibition. Tijuana during Prohibition created an atmosphere where gambling, drinking and debauchery was a staple of everyday life. With this in mind, the ‘Peteet family left their home in San Diego around the mid-afternoon on January 30\(^{th}\) 1926 and headed down Old Highway 101 into Tijuana.’\textsuperscript{110}

When leaving San Diego to Tijuana the Peteet family would have been stopped at the Immigration checkpoint on the United States and Mexico border. The Old Highway 101 was a popular route for people looking to cross the border and go into Mexico. While there were other avenues to cross the border, such as the ‘trolley service from San Diego to Tijuana or the San Diego and Arizona Railway which opened transcontinental passenger service through California and eastern cities to Tijuana’, the Peteet family chose to drive across the border.\textsuperscript{111} The Peteet family when driving through the border would have been met with lines like in Figure 4 below waiting to cross the border during Prohibition. The development of transportation networks was essential for the growth of the borderlands during the 19\(^{th}\) century and continued to play an important during Prohibition. The increase in number of tourists visiting Tijuana during Prohibition meant that transportation networks were vital for making sure the tourists were able to cross the border.

\textsuperscript{110} During Immigration Officer Hannah’s interview with the San Diego Union on February 7\(^{th}\) he claimed that the Peteet family said that they went to Tijuana by car on Old Highway 101. This would appear to be accurate because on their return trip on their way from Tijuana they were stopped along Old Highway 101 returning home from their vacation. Therefore, it is most likely that the Peteet family decided to take the same route down to Tijuana as they did when they returned.
\textsuperscript{111} De Baca Dissertation, 73.
The United States and Mexico border was not only geographic, but also a legal and moral boundary. When crossing the border the Peteet family was outside of the laws of the United States and at the mercy of Mexican law enforcement. However, this did not deter Americans during Prohibition like the Peteet family. Despite the ‘reformers, in particular the Anti-Saloon league, who preached against going to the immoral Mexico with its vice pleasure, people still chose to go to Tijuana.’

Tijuana’s tourist district emerged ‘as a circus and boomtown when small-time vice entrepreneurs settled in with the customary retinue of professional gamblers, card sharps, bunko men, prostitutes and their pimps, who thrived and proliferated in such a rolling atmosphere.’

Figure 7 below shows the United States’ Customs and Immigration

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112 San Diego Union, Automobiles crossing into Tijuana, Mexico from the United States (Tijuana, Mexico: San Diego Historical Society, 1925)
113 When referring to vice I am talking about the bars, saloons, casinos and resorts which were open to the public during Prohibition in Tijuana.
114 Vanderwood, 77.
Services at the Tijuana and San Diego Border were the Peteet family would have been stopped at before entering Tijuana.

**Figure 7 – U.S Customs Office when entering Tijuana**

The Peteet family arrived in Tijuana at 6:00 p.m. on January 30th, 1926 and settled into the San Diego Hotel. The San Diego Hotel was located in the heart of Tijuana’s downtown tourist district and was based just off of Revolution Avenue. Revolution Avenue was where American tourists were able to experience the vice activities which were available to them in Tijuana within the boundaries of the Mexican law. When the Peteet family arrived and checked into the hotel the first thing they did was explore Revolution Avenue. For a family who cited boredom as their reason for going to Tijuana on a vacation, Revolution Avenue did not disappoint. According to Immigration Officer Hannah, when the Peteet’s arrived in Tijuana, “they walked around the town and had some beer and registered at the San Diego Hotel

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The Peteet family took in the vice which Tijuana had to offer.

The Peteet family “spent the remainder of the day eating, drinking, gambling, and carrying on in a manner unfit for polite society. Come evening, witnesses saw the family drinking excessively in shabby saloons on the infamous Revolution Avenue or at popular Agua Caliente.” The short distance between Tijuana and their home in San Diego was emphasized by Thomas after checking into the San Diego Hotel. Thomas Peteet “crossed the border, drove twenty miles home to feed his cat, and then returned to Tijuana in the afternoon.” The close proximity of Tijuana to San Diego added to the aura and allure of crossing the border. The Peteet family on their first day in Tijuana was taking advantage of the pleasures which were available to them across the border in Mexico.

The Peteet family the following day, Sunday January 30th, “returned to San Diego and looked after some things in the home and later returned back to the San Diego Hotel. At nights they would go out to the bars and saloons on Revolution Avenue to drink beer.” The Peteet family were not interested in seeing the cultural side of Tijuana, but rather were there for the night life and vice. The Peteet family continued to go out and enjoy Tijuana’s night life on “Monday and Tuesday nights, staying at the same hotel.” The photo below showed what Main Street Mexico would have looked like when the Peteet family visited Tijuana.

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116 Thomas Peteet Disposition, February 5th, 1926, Bishop Collection # 88:17083, Research Archives, San Diego Archives, San Diego Historical Society
117 San Diego Union, February 7th, 1926
119 Thomas Peteet Disposition, February 5th, 1926, Bishop Collection # 88:17083, Research Archives, San Diego Archives, San Diego Historical Society
120 San Diego Union, February 7th, 1926
However, it was on Wednesday, February 3rd, when the fortunes of the Peteet family began to take a turn for the worse. On Wednesday Thomas Peteet “left his wife and daughters at the hotel and went to San Diego (this is most likely to go and feed his cat which he had done on previous trips during the vacation in Tijuana) returning to Tijuana around 4:00. Upon his arrival to Tijuana he called a Mexican physician as his wife, Carrie, was not feeling well.”\(^\text{122}\) A doctor “examined her and prescribed some morphine to quiet her nerves which at the time were rather unstrung. Other witnesses speculated, however, that her condition resulted from a bad hangover.”\(^\text{123}\) This would not be surprising as the Peteet family had been seen going into bars and enjoying the night life of Tijuana. In Thomas Peteet’s deposition he stated to Immigration Officer Hannah that the family “drank beer” and the continual nature of this well could have led to the hung-over state of his wife. However, Thomas and his two daughters still wanted to enjoy

\(^{121}\) Joseph Haase, *U.S. Customs and Immigration buildings at the U.S.-Mexico border looking north from Tijuana* (Tijuana, Mexico: San Diego Historical Society, 1920)

\(^{122}\) Thomas Peteet Disposition, February 5th, 1926, Bishop Collection # 88:17083, Research Archives, San Diego Archives, San Diego Historical Society

\(^{123}\) *San Diego Union*, February 7th, 1926
the nightlife in Tijuana regardless of his wife’s condition. While the mother remained in the hotel room, Peteet took the two daughters into various Tijuana saloons searching for cold beer and Hawaiian music. Thomas Peteet’s deposition below gives an account of the events which followed that evening to his family:

In the evening, wishing to hear some Hawaiian music, we went to the Oakland Bar. My daughters and I sat down at a table and we had some beer. There were people dancing. The bar tender (Luis Amador) told me that one of them dancing was the Chief of Police and asked me if I would like to meet him and I said yes. He introduced him to us, and the Chief asked me if he could dance with my younger daughter and I said that he could. They danced and I bought a round of drinks and the Chief did the same. After I had taken that drink I remembered nothing until I found myself in bed in the hotel. It is my belief that I was drugged. My wife said that I had been taken there by a man at about 10:00 P.M. Then my wife said she left to go and look for the girls, but could not find them.  

**Figure 9 – Oakland Bar**[125](#)

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[125] The Oakland Bar (Courtesy of San Diego Historical Society- Ticor Collection)
The San Diego Union when interviewing Officer Hannah was able to get more information on the events which happened to the Peteet family that night in Tijuana on February 3rd.

The ailing Carrie became so concerned about her missing family that she got out of bed and searched the border town for them. She found her husband lying in an alley behind the Oakland Bar. He was in a horrible condition and she helped them back to their room (with the aid of a man). Frantic, she hired a cab to search for Clyde and Audrey in the saloons on the Revolution Avenue. She went to the Hot Springs Hotel, four miles east of the center of Tijuana, but the hotel staff refused to let her search the premises. Reluctantly, Mrs. Peteet returned to her husband’s bedside and waited word for the missing girls. 126

Officer Hannah’s account of the events from Mrs. Peteet gave the interpretation that her husband was intoxicated. It is not clear whether or not he was drugged from her account, but what is clear is that Thomas Peteet was in no state to recall the events of what took place after he had the “new drink.” Her frantic search for her children showed the genuine fear which she had for the well-being of her children. The photo below shows the location of Hotel Springs where she frantically looked for her children without avail.

With the children still not found despite the best attempts by their mother, Carrie and Thomas returned to their hotel. However, when they returned to their hotel Audrey was in one of the rooms which the family had rented. In her deposition to Immigration Officer Hannah Audrey stated that after being driven back to the hotel by people she could not remember she was “taken to the rooms of my mother in the San Diego Hotel.” 127 However, with one of his daughter still missing Thomas Peteet stated the next morning on February 4th “as soon as it was daylight we

126 San Diego Union, February 7th, 1926
127 Audrey Peteet Deposition, February 5th, 1926, Bishop Collection # 88:17083, Research Archives, San Diego Archives, San Diego Historical Society
went again to look for Clyde, and when I reported the matter received no assistance.”

After Clyde reappeared, at “8:00 a.m. on Thursday when she was found in the lobby of their hotel, Thomas Peteet approached U.S. immigration officers at the border for help.” However, the U.S. Agents had no jurisdiction south of the border, and they told Peteet to return when their superior arrived. At “12:00 p.m. the family left Tijuana, crossed the border, and registered at the Derby Hotel near San Ysidro in the United States Thomas Peteet returned to the port of entry and spoke to Officer-in-Charge Harry Hannah for the first time.” Peteet and Hannah crossed the border together at “1:00 pm and met with Tijuana Mayor Federico Palacio, to whom Peteet recounted the incident.”

They agreed on a” second meeting in Hannah’s office, at 2:00 p.m.; so the Peteet girls could tell Mayor Palacio their stories. However, they failed to meet the Tijuana mayor, who waited two hours before returning to Mexico. At 4:30 p.m., Officer Hannah interviewed the Peteet women at their hotel room, where he collected the written depositions for them.” At this point, American and Mexican officials had the victims’ statements. They promised full investigations and said they hoped to bring charges forwarded eventually. In frustration, Thomas Peteet told the investigators “he wanted to get his pistol and take personal revenge on the guilty parties.”

Below are the official depositions recorded by Immigration Officer Hannah to Thomas, Clyde and Audrey Peteet when he interviewed on February 4th.

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128 Thomas Peteet Disposition, February 5th, 1926, Bishop Collection # 88:17083, Research Archives, San Diego Archives, San Diego Historical Society
129 San Diego Union, February 7th, 1926
130 ibid
132 San Diego Union, February 7th, 1926
133 ibid
**Thomas Peteet’s Deposition**

Thomas M Peteet, being first duly sworn, deposes and says that he is an American citizen and that he is 55 years of age; that he is a salesman; that he gets goods from Chicago and sells them; that he lives at 4423 Arch Street, San Diego Cal. That on Saturday, the 30th day of January, 1926, he went with his wife and two daughters to Tijuana, Mexico, about 6 P.M. They walked around the town and had some beer and registered at the San Diego Hotel (Tijuana)\(^{134}\), Rooms No.1 and No. 6. On Sunday they returned to their home in San Diego and looked after things in the home and later returned to Tijuana. They did the same thing on Monday and Tuesday nights, staying at the same hotel. On Wednesday he left his wife and daughters at the hotel and returned to San Diego and returned to Tijuana about 4 P.M. His wife not being very well, he took his two daughters and they had some beer in different places and later in the evening wishing to hear some Hawaiian music, we went to the Oakland Bar. My daughters and I sat down at a table and we had some beer. There were people dancing. The bar tender (Luis Amador) told me that one of them dancing was the Chief of Police and asked me if I would like to meet him and I said yes. He introduced him to us, and the Chief asked me if he could dance with my younger daughter and I said that he could. They danced and I bought a round of drinks and the Chief did the same. After I had taken that drink I remembered nothing until I found myself in bed in the hotel. It is my belief that I was drugged. My wife said that I had been taken there by a man at about 10:00 P.M. Then my wife said she left to go and look for the girls, but could not find them. As soon as it was daylight we went again to look for the girls, and I reported the matter to the Police, but could not get assistance. Later I reported the matter to Mr. Markley (United States Immigration Inspector at the border) who promised to have the matter investigated. I was present today when a special investigator officer came to my house on February 5th and asked if he could get a statement from my daughters, and I heard the investigator read it to each of them. I had compared it with the copies I hereby attached, and I know it to be the same as told to him and signed by them.\(^{135}\)

**Audrey Peteet Deposition**

My name is Audrey Peteet. I am nineteen years of age and the daughter of Thomas M. Peteet. I was drinking with my father and sister when we were introduced to the Chief of Police and danced with him. The last drink that I had the Chief said to the bartender something that I did not understand and he gave me a small drink. After that I did not remember anything until I woke up, partly undressed. I knew that I was assaulted by the Chief of Police. Later I was put in a car and taken to the rooms of my mother in the San Diego Hotel.\(^{136}\)

\(^{134}\) In the Disposition Tijuana is spelt ‘Tiajuana,’ but I changed it to its correct spelling as Tijuana in the deposition.

\(^{135}\) Thomas Peteet Deposition, February 5th, 1926, Bishop Collection # 88:17083, Research Archives, San Diego Archives, San Diego Historical Society

\(^{136}\) Audrey Peteet Deposition, February 5th, 1926, Bishop Collection # 88:17083, Research Archives, San Diego Archives, San Diego Historical Society

\(^{137}\) In the Disposition Tijuana is spelt ‘Tiajuana,’ but I changed it to its correct spelling as Tijuana in the deposition.
Clyde Peteet Deposition

I am twenty six years of age and the daughter of Thomas M. Peteet. My father and sister were in a saloon having some beer and listening to the music. The bartender asked my father if he could introduce the Chief of Police, who was dancing with a girl, and my father said he could. My sister danced with him. The bartender and the Chief were ordering drinks. The next thing that I remember I was in a car with a man by the name of Louie. He had his hands over my mouth and dragged me into the hotel and into a room and there he attacked me. All the time I was calling for help, but no one came. I think the hotel is the Nacional. Later a man came into the room and he said he had been sent by Louie. At this time I knew what I was doing and put him out of the room. Then a man came and said that I ought to have something to quiet me and he gave me something is a glass. After this I knew nothing until I found myself in my bed. My father came later with a policeman and found me. Later we reported the matter to Mr. Malarkey at the border. (Later, Officer Hannah told the press that Clyde verbally elaborated that the first man was Asian and that the second man, who drugged her and raped her, looked American.)

Figure 10 – Hotel Nacional

The despondent family received no immediate legal or medical help from the U.S. border officers and was left to cope with their emotional pain on their own. After their interviews with Officer Hannah the family left their hotel in San Ysidro and headed back to their hotel. That evening at; “7:30 p.m. police stopped Thomas Peteet who was driving his family car on Old

138 Clyde Peteet Deposition, February 5th, 1926, Bishop Collection # 88:17083, Research Archives, San Diego Archives, San Diego Historical Society
139 San Diego Union, February 7th, 1926
Highway 101 headed for San Diego.” The police found “Thomas, Carrie and Clyde thoroughly intoxicated and seized three bottles of whisky in the car. The police deemed Audrey sober enough to take her mother and sister home by a taxi. However, Thomas was arrested and taken to the San Diego jail.” The rest of the family went drove back to their home in San Diego without their father.

Thomas Peteet was released by the ‘San Diego Police on Friday morning and was seen by his neighbors at home watering his yard.’ Later in the day Private detective Captain James M Adamson of Atlanta visited the Peteet family. The Catton Insurance Company had sent Captain Adamson to investigate a client’s suspicious death in a Tijuana jail, and while he was in Tijuana he heard of the Peteet’s problem with the Tijuana police. The detective visited the family and took depositions similar to that of Officer Hannah. As the last person to see them alive, he was an inquest witness; he received a mailed letter from Thomas Peteet. The letter read “Push this case and, if you can, have the government avenge our wrongs. We will appreciate it wherever we go, maybe. Death was always preferred to dishonor women.”

On Saturday afternoon, Thomas’s co-worker Dan Conlogue went to the Peteet home, concerned that Thomas had missed so much work. When he went over to the Peteet house to go investigate he found a note in the mailbox on the porch which read “Please deliver these letters at once. Have the police open up the house. Beware of the Gas.” Conlogue immediately rushed to the police station. Eventually, “two rumpled flatfoots, George Cooley and F.W. Blacker,

141 Vincent Cabeza de Baca and Juan Cabeza de Baca, 604.
142 San Diego Union, February 7th, 1926
143 Vincent Cabeza de Baca and Juan Cabeza de Baca, 604.
144 The depositions by Captain Adamson were never made public and since he did not testify at the trial they were never given as evidence.
146 San Diego Union, February 7th, 1926
responded to the scene.**147 They cops finally broke two windows to clear the gas before they covered their mouths and entered the Peteet house. When the police finally broke into the house through the windows they discovered the family in ‘the kitchen they were laying side by side upon neatly piled pillows and blankets’ which was coined the death couch.148 The “mother and youngest daughter were initially supposed asleep, but were lifeless and deadly cold. The father’s constricted face gave evidence of his painful last moments; an unfired pistol lay by his hand. The eldest daughter Clyde was barely alive frothing and unconscious on the kitchen floor.**149 There was no evidence at the house for why the family committed suicide or why it was done in such a peculiar nature. The remains of the ‘family’s last meal was left on the kitchen table. Lastly, the wet, stiff carcass of their pet cat was found in a sack on the back porch.**150

The culmination of events which took place leading up to the peculiar death of the Peteet family created media frenzy. What was supposed to be only a family vacation to spice up their monotonous lives in San Diego turned out to be a disaster. The Peteet family were able to get in Tijuana what they were looking for in terms of the vice life which it had become renowned for possessing. However, the alleged events which took place created a new dimension. The border was not just a geographic boundary, but a moral one as well. The Peteet family brought into question the liabilities of the border. This case would create political, cultural, and economic turmoil.

148 San Diego Union, February 7th, 1926
149 ibid
150 Vincent Cabeza de Baca and Juan Cabeza de Baca, 605.
Section IV: Divided moral outrage

The San Diego Union was the first newspaper to release the story publically. It was front page news in the Sunday magazine portion on February 7th, 1926. The title of the article read: “Three killed by gas in kitchen after 5-day visit to Tijuana.”\(^{151}\) The article revealed that ‘three members of the family are dead and a fourth is fighting for her life as a result of a visit to Tijuana.’\(^{152}\) The San Diego Union from the break of the story emphasized that the tragic suicide was as a result of the family’s trip to Tijuana. The San Diego Union claimed that the suicides were caused by “the tragic aftermath of a five-day visit to Tijuana where the two daughters were drugged, kidnapped and disgraced in the dens of the border town.”\(^{153}\) As the story unfolded; ‘the American news media declared that the innocent Peteet’s were not responsible for their fate; Mexicans were to blame.’\(^{154}\) However, the San Diego Union identifies that while the suicides may have been solely by the events which happened in Tijuana and that there was another factor; “Lying near the body of the father was an automatic pistol.”\(^{155}\)

The “unfired pistol” added a new potential dynamic to the Peteet family deaths. The Union claimed “this gave reason to believe that Peteet, unable to bear the disgrace he felt had been visited on his family, had conceived a plan to end it all and had used the weapon as threat to anyone withdrawing.”\(^{156}\) The San Diego Union had inferred that the family had potentially no chance but to succumb to the mass suicide as the father “used the weapon as a threat to anyone withdrawing.” However, it is important to point out that there is no evidence which backs up the

\(^{151}\) San Diego Union, February 7th, 1926
\(^{152}\) ibid
\(^{153}\) ibid
\(^{155}\) San Diego Union, February 7th, 1926
\(^{156}\) ibid
San Diego Union’s view as being true or false. During his deposition to Immigration Officer Hannah, interview with Captain Adamson, note to his worker Dan Conlogue and his Will he never stated that he wanted to take his family’s life. It is unlikely that anyone will ever know what the role of the pistol was in the suicides, but the fact that the pistol was present and “was not fired” adds to their strangeness. However, the Union reported that not all of the family members had initially died in the suicides.

The San Diego Union reported that one of the daughters, Clyde, “was still fighting for her life” from the suicides which resulted in the death of her father, mother, sister and cat.\textsuperscript{157} The potential survival/following of the girl’s progress was going to be popular news. Therefore, it was not surprising that the case was going to be heavily followed and was front page news. The Peteet family was definitely being portrayed as the innocent party and that the catalyst for their deaths was their trip to Tijuana. Therefore, from the beginning of when the story was released the Peteet family was always presented as the victims. ‘As a rule, the press needed sensational news to sell papers’ and newspapers were able to use the fascinating story line of the Peteet family’s to Tijuana their fiscal advantage.\textsuperscript{158} However, the Peteet suicides were more than just a story used to sell newspapers, but also one which had political consequences.

The San Diego Union’s article on February 7th showed that the law enforcement was immediately involved with the case. H.B. Hannah, in charge of the U.S immigration office at the border, confirmed the belief that the family had been to Tijuana and told the startling story of the Peteet’s sojourn there. He had talked to Mrs. Peteet and the daughters late Thursday afternoon when, shaken by the experience they had been through, they had sought his aid. The following

\textsuperscript{157} San Diego Union, February 7\textsuperscript{th}, 1926
\textsuperscript{158} Andrew Grant Wood, On the border: society and culture between the United States and Mexico (Lanham, MD: SR Books, 2004) 150.
account was the transcript was from an interview given by the *San Diego Union* with Officer Hannah on Saturday February 6th. The interview conducted by the *San Diego Union* goes into more detail than the official depositions which were taken by Officer Hannah. Officer Hannah provides a detailed account of the events which happened to the Peteet family and portrays the involvement of the United States and Mexican authorities when dealing with the events which took place in Tijuana. The readers of the *San Diego Union* were able to see in vivid detail what happened to the Peteet family in Tijuana from Officer Hannah’s account. The account served as the initial source of information for what happened to the Peteet family in Tijuana:

On January 30th the family went to Tijuana and engaged two rooms at the San Diego Hotel. Peteet admitted that during the next few days, he, his wife and daughters took in the sights, drank freely and gambled a little. The girls confined their drinking, for the most part, to just beer. On the evening of February 3rd Mrs. Peteet complained of feeling ill and seemed to be in considerable pain, so her husband called a physician who gave her some morphine to calm her nerves which at the time were rather unstrung. The mother remained in the San Diego Hotel, and the father and the two girls went for a walk around the town.

The three entered a bar soon after 8:00, sat down at a table and ordered some drinks, the girls taking beers. They had several rounds when the owner and bartender, known as Luis, introduced the father to a Mexican with a black mustache, with the latter being the chief police of Tijuana. Peteet asked the chief to join the party and bought a round of drinks. The alleged chief reciprocated and several additional rounds were brought to the table. Luis then approached the table and suggested that the father and his two daughters try a new drink. They assented and after the concoction which was served in small glasses, seemed to grow weak physically and felt a peculiar numbness creeping over them. Their minds, while considerably muddled, were clever enough to realize what was going around them by 9 o’clock, however, they had completely lost control of their faculties and seemed to be in a drugged stupor.

According to Clyde, the older of the two girls, she remembered nothing after 9:00 that evening until she awoke in a strange place with the chief of police and realized that he was attacking her. She tried to struggle against him, but she was physically so weak that her attempts to free herself were futile. In about two or three hours the chief put her into an automobile, driven by a Mexican, and after a ride of about half-hour, helped her from the car to the sidewalk in front of the San Diego hotel, assisted her up the hotel steps and left her. She joined her mother and father in their hotel room that evening.

During the absence of the father and her two daughters, the mother, becoming alarmed that they hadn’t returned, started out to search for them at around 9. She found
the father on the street in what she described as in a horrible condition, succeeded in getting him back to the hotel, then started out searching for the girls. Unable to find them on the streets or in any of the saloons, she hired an automobile and went to Tijuana Hot Springs. She was informed at the hotel that no girls matching the description of her daughters had been seen and she refused permission to look through the rooms of the place. Mrs. Peteet returned to Tijuana and was in the San Diego hotel room with her husband when her daughter Clyde had arrived.

Meantime Audrey, the other daughter, had been undergoing an experience similar to that of her sister. She said she remembered fighting with Luis in the bar to prevent him from putting her in an automobile in front of the saloon, but she was so weak from the effects of the drugged drink that her resistance was in vain. The machine started down the street and stopped in front of the Hollywood rooms, into which Louis took her. She said she screamed all the way to the rooming house, but no one came to her assistance. Once in the room, Luis became amorous, addressed her in endearing terms, and then attacked her. He left after about two hours telling her to lock the door and he would return later. She was too weak to lift herself from the bed to reach the door, so ingress into the room was an easy matter. Soon after Louis had gone a Chinaman or Japanese (she was unable to say which) entered, but in some manner she summoned sufficient strength to fight him off. An hour later a man wearing glasses, who Audrey said looked like an American and spoke good English and whom she had seen behind the bar at the Oakland Care came into the room carrying a small glass with some liquor in it. He said that Luis had sent the drink up as a straightener. She drank it and suddenly became weak and again lost control of her physical senses. While she was in this condition the stranger who had given her the drink attacked her.

She remained in the room in a half-stupor until about 11 o’clock the next morning (Thursday) when she was taken back to her mother at the San Diego Hotel by a Mexican Police Officer. At 8 o’clock on that same morning (Thursday) Peteet came across the borderline and asked A.A. Musgrave and Sidney Baker United States Immigration Officers to aid him in finding his daughter Audrey. He told them the story of Clyde’s experiences of the night previous. The officers told him to apply to the Mexican Police, whereupon he returned to Tijuana. At 1:00 p.m. I was called to the office of Frederico Palacio, mayor of Tijuana, on another matter and while there I recounted the story told to me by Musgrave and Baker. The mayor called me the chief of police and informed him of Audrey Peteet’s disappearance. About noon, after I had returned to the United States Immigration Offices, Peteet, his wife and two daughters came across the line in their Ford. Peteet told me the whole story to me and I asked him to accompany me to Mayor Palacio’s office and repeat the details, telling him I would be ready to leave in about half an hour. While waiting for me, Peteet drove his daughters to the Derby Hotel not far from the line, engaged a room and left the three there. He returned to my office and we went to Tijuana, where he repeated the details of the night’s experiences to Mayor Palacio. I then arranged with the mayor to hear the story from the two girls at my office at 2:00 p.m. The mayor kept the appointment, but the girls did not appear. I sent one of the immigration inspectors to get them, but he returned from the Derby Hotel at 2:00 p.m. and reported that the mother and girls were in a hysterical condition and that Peteet was missing. Mayor Palacio waited until 4:00 and when the girls failed to turn up he returned to
Tijuana. On my way back to San Diego at 4:40 I stopped at the hotel and found the girls and their mother in a pitiable condition in their room, but managed to draw the whole story from them in all of its sordid detail. That was the last time I saw any of the members of the Peteet family alive.\(^{159}\)

The *San Diego Union* continued to lead the way on reporting the developing Peteet Suicides. The front page of the February 8\(^{th}\), 1926 addition read “Daughter of Suicide Family still Defies Death” and reported that “Clyde is unconscious 40 hours after finding her with bodies’ gassed kin.”\(^{160}\) There was national interest in the survival of Clyde as she would hopefully be able to retell the story of what happened to the family in Tijuana. Her potential survival would have been able to clarify Immigration Officer Hannah’s account of the events which took place in Tijuana according to the Peteet family.\(^{161}\) However, on February 9\(^{th}\) the *San Diego Union* reported that “Girl dies at 12:30 a.m. after long fight for her life” and with her death left the last possible attempt to learn what exactly happened to the Peteet family during the their trip to Tijuana and what caused them to commit the suicide.\(^{162}\) However, by the time of Clyde’s death the American authorities had already been making inquests into what exactly happened to the Peteet family in Tijuana.

American officials from the outbreak of the Suicides were out to seek justice for the Peteet family. The main person who led the attack on the Mexican officials and looking into the events which took place in Tijuana was San Diego Coroner Schuyler O. Kelly. Coroner Kelly played a crucial role in linking the public with the political decisions which were being made in reference to the Peteet suicides. The grotesque nature of the alleged events which took place in Tijuana to the Peteet family and the potential reaction by the public caused the American

\(^{159}\) *San Diego Union*, February 7\(^{th}\), 1926  
\(^{160}\) *San Diego Union*, February 8\(^{th}\), 1926  
\(^{161}\) I am referring to the interview which was conducted between the *San Diego Union* and Immigration Officer Hannah which was published in the February 7\(^{th}\) *San Diego Union* paper.  
\(^{162}\) *San Diego Union*, February 9\(^{th}\), 1926
investigators to make an inquisition into the events. On February 7th, Coroner Kelly after his
initial inquests felt that there was a need to investigate the issue and needed the aid of higher
authorities ‘prompting Kelly to call the U.S. State Department to take appropriate federal action
in the Tijuana tragedy.’ The desire of the local San Diego law enforcement to seek national aid
showed the desire to get to the bottom of the suicides. Therefore, ‘Secretary of State Kellogg
responded to Coroner Kelly that his office was investigating the case.’ The American
authorities’ involvement caused there to be pressure put on the Mexican officials to launch an
investigation.

The Mexican officials had already been knowledgeable of the Peteet family from when
they pleaded their case to the local Tijuana officials during their visit. The San Diego Union
reported that Chief of the Tijuana Police Zenaldo Llanos explained that “Peteet came to him on
Thursday to make an inquiry on his missing daughters” and claimed that he was “fully
cooperative with Mr. Peteet and the Tijuana Police was integral in locating the lost daughters.”
In Immigration Officer Hannah’s interview with the San Diego Union he acknowledges the
Tijuana Police were helpful in finding the girls and that “Clyde was taken back to her mother at
the San Diego Hotel Mexican Police Officer.” It appeared that the Peteet family was at fault
for not being more cooperative with the Tijuana authorities when they reported their crimes.
Officer Hannah had organized a meeting with the Mayor of Tijuana, Frederico Palacio, with
Thomas Peteet and they both drove down to Tijuana to meet the Mayor. However, when the
Mayor requested to speak to the Peteet daughters at 2:00 p.m. at Officer Hannah’s office “they

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163 Wood, p.151
164 ibid
165 This is the Thursday February 4th, 1926 when the Peteet family was in Tijuana on their family vacation.
166 San Diego Union, February 8th, 1926
167 San Diego Union, February 7th, 1926
did not appear and Mayor Palacio waited until 4:00 and when the girls failed to turn up returned to Tijuana.”¹⁶⁸ However, it appeared that the Mexican and United States’ officials were working together to try and solve the events which took place to the Peteet family in Tijuana. Policing the border was dependent on cooperation between the United States and Mexican officials due to the increase in tourism during Prohibition. Therefore, the success of finding out who was allegedly responsible for the Peteet Suicides was dependent on United States and Mexican cooperation.

The first arrest was made on February 8th, 1926 by the Mexican officials. The *San Diego Union* reported in the February 9th edition that “Luis Amador the proprietor of the Oakland Bar in Tijuana, is under police surveillance, his establishment is closed, and at least one other is arrested following an investigation by the Mayor of Tijuana (Frederico Palacio) over the deaths of the Peteet family.”¹⁶⁹ The arrest was made after there was evidence provided by Tijuana physician linking Amador to the Peteet daughters. The *Union* reported that Dr. Dagoberto Molina Figueroa had completed a chemical analysis of the liquors at Amador’s saloon and the register of the Hotel Nacional, Tijuana. Amador, according to Dr. Dagoberto Molina Figueroa, checked into the Hotel Nacional “under the name J.O. Friend who had room 9 in the hotel last Wednesday night” as his handwriting was the same at the registrar and Amador’s saloon.¹⁷⁰ The Tijuana police were showing their American counterparts that they were making inroads into getting to the bottom of who was responsible for the Peteet suicides. However, with the Peteet suicides being front page news in the United States there was a demand for those responsible to be brought to justice.

¹⁶⁸ *San Diego Union*, February 7th, 1926
¹⁶⁹ *San Diego Union*, February 9th, 1926
¹⁷⁰ ibid
With their being a large amount of interest from the American public fueled by the newspaper coverage of the Peteet suicides there was pressure on officials to punish those who were allegedly guilty. The *San Diego Union* reported that Governor Albelardo Rodriguez of Baja California assured that “every resource of Lower California will be used to bring those responsible for the attack on Audrey Peteet to justice.” Governor Rodriguez’s declaration of Tijuana officials’ ongoing investigation into the Peteet case was as a result of the United States Department of State’s investigation into the suicides. Governor Rodriguez was “assuring American Consul Frank Rohr of the Mexican Consulate after the American official had received instructions from the state department of Washington to make a thorough investigation of the case.” While the Tijuana officials had already made an arrest in connection with the Peteet family, it became clear that the United States State Department would not be satisfied until justice was served. Since United States officials did not have jurisdiction in Mexico they could only rely on persuading the Mexican officials to take action. Despite the mere eighteen miles which separated San Diego from Tijuana the American officials were unable to interrogate or prosecute any potential suspects. Therefore, the newspapers back in the United States played an important role in telling the story and portraying how the Mexican officials were going about the investigation.

On February 12th, 1926 Governor Rodriguez of Baja California announced that a total of seven people were arrested in connection with the Peteet suicides. Inspector General of Baja California Francisco M. Peralta made the arrests based on the work conducted by his department, the Tijuana Police Department and the Secretary of State of Baja California Antonio Martinez. The Union reported that the primary evidence linking the seven defendants to the Peteet family

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171 *San Diego Union*, February 10th, 1926
172 ibid
was “by checking and amalgamating the information obtained during the witness’s depositions and an examination of the handwriting upon the registers in the hotels believed to be have been visited by Amador and Audrey Peteet.” The seven Mexicans who were arrested were “Zenaldo Llanos, Luis Amador, Refugio Alvarez, Francisco Gonzales, Juan York Sang, Salvador Espinoza and Francisco Navarro.” The arrests made showed that Baja California district officials were beginning to make progress in convicting those responsible for the Peteet suicides. The accused were held as Federal prisoners not only because it was made a Federal case, but also to eliminate the possibility of them being liberated under bail. The *San Diego Union* reported that since the Federal prisoners were held for investigation that “definite charges will be urged against them when the government presents its case to the courts and demands an indictment against them.” Therefore, there was considerable tension between the United States and the Mexican press, government and publics while the evidence was being collected against the Federal prisoners.

During the period in between the hearing and the arrests of the prisoners the Mexican and American media covered the event with great interest. On February 12th Coroner Kelly released the affidavits of the Peteet family. Initially given to Immigration Officer Hannah these were

173 *San Diego Union*, February 11th, 1926
174 Zenaldo Llanos was the Chief of Police in Tijuana, was charged with complicity in the crime with Luis Amador, proprietor of the Oakland Café.
175 Luis Amador was the proprietor of the Oakland Café where the alleged alcohol drugging took place. Amador was also wanted in the United States after jumping a $3500 bail bond in Los Angeles after his arrest for the alleged peddling of narcotics.
176 Refugio Alvarez, bartender at the San Diego Café, who was believed to have assaulted Audrey Peteet after the girls, had been brought back from Tijuana Hot Springs.
177 Francisco Gonzales was a member of the Tijuana police department.
178 Juan York Sang was the Chinese Manager of the Hotel Nacional, where Audrey Peteet was found by her father Thursday morning.
179 Salvador Espinoza was the taxi driver who took Mrs. Peteet on a fruitless search for the girls at Tijuana Hot Springs.
180 Francisco Navarro was the bartender for Luis Amador at the Oakland Bar.
181 *San Diego Union*, February 11th, 1926
182 *San Diego Union*, February 12th, 1926
published by the Los Angeles Times. The Los Angeles Times claimed that releasing the Peteet family’s wills was aimed to “stir a crusade” against the border vice which took place in Tijuana. As the newspapers and Mexican Courts tried to determine who was to blame for the Peteet’s demise, a vocal group of indignant Americans, the Anti-Saloon League, shifted their attention away from specifics of the case to focus on the border and the tens of thousands Americans, who like the Peteet’s crossed it each year. In the hands of the American reformers, the ‘Peteet’s story became a parable of the dangers of the vice districts that had emerged along the boundary line in response to the American anti-vice laws. Shock about the events that were reported to have taken place at the Oakland Bar turned to outrage about the existence of that bar and the ease with which the Americans could visit it.” The reformers used the Peteet suicides as propaganda for why one should not go to Tijuana. However, with a case which was in the media and political spotlight the government had to seriously consider how to address the potential dangers of going to Mexico. The United States government would have to seriously consider the results of the hearing in Tijuana against those accused in the Peteet case. However, the reaction to the Peteet suicides was much different in Mexico.

On February 13th Mexico City’s main newspaper, the Excelsior, when talking about the charges against those in the Peteet case claimed:

Certainly, the act is lamentable, and, according to wire service reports, Baja California authorities have already arrested culprits who will be punished to the fullest extent which the law requires. But the truth is that, in this case, no fault can be attributed to the population of Tijuana, not to the officials that govern it, because there are criminals all over the world, and since Mr. Peteet was imprudent enough to have a wild party with his wife and daughters, he and he alone is responsible for the results.

183 Los Angeles Time, February 12th, 1926
184 St. John, 149.
185 Excelsior, February 13th, 1926
The *Excelsior* made its views very clear on the Peteet suicides and that the blame lay not with Tijuana, but with Thomas Peteet. Thomas Peteet had allowed his daughters to drink beer, go into a saloon and dance with random men when the alleged attacks took place in Tijuana. No one forced him to allow himself and his daughters to take part in the vice activities which the family did while in Tijuana. The *Excelsior* was Mexico City’s primary and unlike Tijuana was under the moral reforms which President Obregón was enforcing to the rest of the country outside of the borderlands cities. Therefore, the actions of the Peteet family would have seemed unmoral leading up to the alleged attacks on the Peteet girls, which the accused Mexicans vehemently denied. It was documented in secret depositions to Immigration Officer Hannah that he had been drinking during his trip to Tijuana and with the presence of his daughters as well.¹⁸⁶ The Mexican people clearly felt that the Peteet family, and in particular Thomas Peteet, were at fault for the events which happened in Tijuana. However, the Mexican people were not the only people who felt that the Peteet families were responsible for their fate in Tijuana. In fact, some Americans believed that the Peteet family was at fault for what happened to them in Tijuana.

During a town-hall held in San Diego in response to the arrests made in Tijuana against those in accused in the Peteet case, “Charles. H Marker, a one-time deputy sheriff and secretary of the law enforcement league of San Diego,” expressed his lack of sympathy for the Peteet family.¹⁸⁷ While the reformers arguing against people going to Prohibition focused more on the perils of going to Tijuana in general and the need to clean up Tijuana, Marker was more critical on the blame being put on the Mexican government. Marker in his statement portrayed that the incidents which happened to the Peteet family just had been happening in Tijuana frequently

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¹⁸⁷ *San Diego Union*, February 16th, 1926
during Prohibition, though perhaps they were just not as sensational. However, Marker believed that it was the Americans who were at fault. Marker felt that the fault lied with the American people who chose to cross the border and were responsible for the results of their actions.

Marker, similarly to the reformers of the Anti-Saloon League, believed that the border should be closed to prevent people from being able to cross the border into Mexico. He makes the important point that all of the efforts are futile if there is not support from the local governments to push forward the legislation to block people from travelling to Tijuana from San Diego.

Marker gave the following comment at the statement at the San Diego town-hall:

Don’t worry about Mexico and the Mexico government, the Mexican government is permitting Tijuana to exist because the American people want it there. It is the American money that runs the dens of vice and saloons across the border, and it is the American’s who patronize them. When American’s want Tijuana cleaned up and the border closed those results will be assured. Why get excited about the Peteeet incident? That is only one incident. Others just as bad have occurred frequently in the past, and no one has been talking about them. The one thing to do is close the border now and prevent any more such things from happening. The people of this city (San Diego) can have the border closed whenever they want it closed. The trouble is that there are a lot of San Diegans who will come out to meetings like this and applaud when Tijuana is condemned. Then when the time comes to go on record and make a real effort to close the border town people are silent. I could put my hands on some right here now that I can see as I am talking. They can be found in the chamber of commerce, the lodges and even the churches of the city. Until we make these men come out into the open we will make little headway, for they will undermine all our efforts.  

Similarly to Charles H. Marker, ‘humorist Will Rogers used his popular newspaper column to mock self-righteous American attitudes belittling Mexico.’ Rogers’s satirical article revealed the difficulty of trying to legislate or impose morality in the United States or in Mexico. He makes the point that Americans visit Mexico for exactly the sort of vice activities which got

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188 San Diego Union, February 16th, 1926
189 Wood, 156.
the Peteet family into trouble and not to “just see the mountains.” The article also points out that no one was forcing tourists like the Peteet family to take part in the drinking and gambling when they were in Tijuana. Thomas Peteet in his deposition to Immigration Officer Hannah freely admits that the family “drank beer”, “went to saloons” and “danced to Hawaiian music” when the family was in Tijuana. Rogers is making the point that no one forced the Peteet family to take part in the vice activities while in Tijuana and they were not breaking the Mexican law. The alleged rape and abduction of the Peteet daughters were yet to be determined as fact, but it was clear that they voluntarily took part in the vice activities which were forbidden to them in the United States. Both Marker and Rogers acknowledge that attempting to fix the situation was going to be challenging, but that the blame was not entirely the Mexican authorities fault.

Below is Will Rogers’s article on the reaction to the Peteet suicides and subsequent arrests:

Well, they were having a big stir out there and in fact all over the United States, about Tia Juana, Mexicali and Mex. They want President Coolidge to clean these places up, or make Mexico do it, and if they won’t go to war with them and make ‘em clean ‘em up. It seems they sell drinks down there right over the bar… that is a disgrace to have these things done right there in Mexico, where Americans can go right over and see all of this. American’s don’t want to drink or gamble. They just go over to see the mountains, and these scheming Mexicans grab ‘em make em’ drink, and make em’ make bets, and make em’ watch the horse races for money. It seems that Americans don’t know these places are over there at all, and when they get there these Mexicans spring up on em’ and they have to drink or the Mexicans will kill ‘em. So, Secretary Kellogg is going to send them another note… We come nearer running Mexico then we do New York State…. For the love of Mike, why don’t we let Mexico alone and let them run their own country the way they want to! Suppose, for instance, when had all our scandal in Hollywood, that Mexico had demanded that we clean up; that a lot of their tourists were passing through there every day and that it was contaminating them. We would have laughed ourselves sober. If we have to admit to the world, that we are raising people that don’t know enough to take

proper care of them we will have to do it by another Amendment as follows “Americans are not allowed anywhere they will be subject to evil influences.”

With their being divided opinion on what punishment should be issued to the seven prisoners linked with the Peteet suicides there was a lot of anticipation for the trial hearings. The Los Angeles Times announced in their February 14th edition that “the Tijuana court would be charging the former Chief of Police of the city, Zenaldo Llanos and Luis Amador, owner of the Oakland Bar, with murder. The five other men under investigation will be charged with attack and attack by force.” The announcement of the charges was made by Assistant Federal Attorney General Plutarchos Gallegos which signaled the end of the inquiry made by the Baja California Officials. The article also declared that “because of the gravity of the charges and the wide interest, court will be convened Sunday morning by Judge Urias of the Tijuana Federal Court.” The San Diego Union announced in their February 15th edition that in response to the suggested sentences of the seven defendants “Governor Rodriguez of Baja California ordered the closing of 52 saloons.” The decision to close the 52 border saloons was made before anyone was actually charged or sentences for the Peteet suicides which perhaps indicated that the Baja California government was being proactive to clean up Tijuana.

During the investigation of the Peteet suicides, the Los Angeles Times reported that “Tijuana officials and concerned owners asserted that business has fallen off forty percent during the past week. Saturday, usually the second biggest day of the week saw little business. Dance halls and saloons had few patrons and the town seemed almost deserted tonight.” This was a

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193 Los Angeles Times, February 14th, 1926
194 ibid
195 San Diego Union, February 15th, 1926
196 Los Angeles Times, February 14th, 1926
significant problem for the Mexican economy. During Prohibition the Mexican government became heavily reliant on the foreign investment and tourism of Americans going into Tijuana. With there already being a drop in the amount of tourism due to the Peteet suicides, an ongoing investigation would have put pressure on the Baja California/Tijuana officials to show that actions were being taken to improve the safety of tourists. Therefore, Governor Rodriguez also added that “undesirable Americans to be deported and Mexicans to face exile on Tres Marias Islands, rule will go into effect today; case against prisoners involved in outrages rests with Judge Urias; 72 hours to decide.”

While Judge Urias was still going through the evidence it is important to note that while the trial was taking place that there was an effort being made to clean up Tijuana at the same time with “saloons being closed down with padlocks covering them and rules were being made as well.” For example, Mayor Palacio of Tijuana created the law that “women without escorts are not to be permitted to saloons and that screens are to be placed in front of doors of saloons as well as windows must be glassed.” The efforts being made to clean up Tijuana were an attempt by the Mexican officials to show Americans that Tijuana was still a safe place for tourists to visit. Tourism was a vital part of the Tijuana economy and therefore it was important that the suicides did not threaten the revenue coming in from American tourists. Therefore, by closing down and adjusting the nature of saloons the Tijuana authorities were trying to maintain American’s interested in experiencing vice across the border. However, the reaction to the indictments by the Judge Urias showed that the adjustments made by Mexican authorities were to no avail.

197 *Los Angeles Times*, February 14th, 1926
198 *San Diego Union*, February 17th, 1926
On February 17th, “Judge Urias indicted four in the Peteet case and let other three prisoners go free” reported the San Diego Union. Judge Urias issued the following charges to the four prisoners:

Zenaldo Llanos, Chief of Police of Tijuana and a political power of the border; Luis Amador, former Proprietor of Oakland Bar, where drugging of the Peteet girls took place prior to their night of shame, and Refugio Alvarez, bartender, are charged in accusations with assault with violence. Francisco Gonzalez, formerly a member of the Tijuana police force, was accused of implications.

One key charge which was dropped against the seven accused in the Peteet case was of murder. In the build-up to the hearings the Los Angeles Times, after releasing the Peteet family’s depositions, claimed that “death before a firing squad was predicted for the principals among the seven prisoners held in connection with the case if they confess” to murder. However, at no time did Judge Urias consider execution to be a possible punishment for the seven accused defendants. It was said that during the hearing that Judge Urias explained “by no twist of the evidence or the law governing the case could the accused men be held accountable for murder, as the members of the Peteet family took their own lives.” This seemed to be a perfectly legitimate claim, despite the suggestions of American newspapers that those found guilty should be punished more severely. With the Baja California officials and Tijuana federal district court taking action on the Peteet case it was now the United States’ turn to respond to the indictments.

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199 San Diego Union, February 18th, 1926
200 The charge was the severest made in connection made with the case. It corresponds to a grand-jury indictment in California and means that the three principals in the affair will now have an opportunity to present extenuating circumstances (15 days).
201 Judge Urias explained that the charge, under Mexican Law, is equivalent to a charge that Gonzalez knew what was taking place, realized that a wrong was being committed, but neglected to make any report of the matter, despite the fact that he was a police officer.
202 Los Angeles Times, February 18th, 1926.
203 Los Angeles Times, February 12th, 1926
204 Los Angeles Times, February 18th, 1926.
In response to the indictments of those accused in the Peteet case the United States government acted quickly. Less than ‘an hour after Judge Urias’s ruling, the U.S. government reacted immediately.’\textsuperscript{205} The United States government ordered that the “border to be closed from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 a.m. with immediate effect.”\textsuperscript{206} The closing of the border was viewed as the United States response to the Peteet case indictments. However, the closing of the border gates on February 18\textsuperscript{th} was not entirely a new phenomenon. By the time the Peteet family’s deaths, border closures and the fences, as well as gates and government officials that made their enforcement possible had become part of the border control apparatus. What ‘was new in the 1920’s was not that the U.S officials were closing the border, but why and when they did so.’\textsuperscript{207}

By convincing the Treasury Department to establish early closing hours, American reformers successfully harnessed the power of the border to enforce regulations.

The closing of the border represented a victory for the Anti-Saloon league and other reformers in the United States who were pushing for the border to be closed. While the United States government was not able to influence the court proceedings taking place in Tijuana, the closing of the border represented a form of moral punishment on Mexico. The accused in the Peteet suicides were not convicted of any crimes when the curfew was created by the American government, but only their indictments. The United States government made a statement that the Mexican government had a moral responsibility to maintain the safety of tourists. However, the reaction to the curfew was mixed in the United States and Mexico.

\textsuperscript{205} Wood, p.161
\textsuperscript{206} San Diego Union, February 18\textsuperscript{th}, 1926.
\textsuperscript{207} Line in the Sand, p.150
The conditional controls raised questions about who had the right to regulate the boundary line and on what basis they should be allowed to enforce that control. While ‘American reformers lauded the establishment of early closing hours, many business people, bureaucrats, and Mexican Nationalists challenged the U.S, government’s authority to unilaterally use the border line for the purposes of enforcing moral standards.’ Naturally, the Mexican government was outraged by the curfew and blamed the Peteet family. It was clear that the Mexican people felt that the punishment was unfair as it affected too many people, businesses and income that had nothing to do with the suicides. It was no secret that tourism was an important source of

\[208\text{ Los Angeles Times, February 19th, 1926} \]
\[209\text{ St. John, 151.}\]
business for Mexico and in particular Tijuana who had benefited greatly from the increase in Americans visiting because of Prohibition.

The headline of the February 19th *San Diego Union* in response to the curfew read “Tijuana’s Business men to appeal early closing”210. The article showed that it was not just the Mexican business people who were affected by the curfew. The *Los Angeles Times* reported that “the owners of the resorts in Baja California today circulated petitions appealing to President Coolidge and other officials at Washington to modify the order.”211 Americans who had investments and concessions were seeking in the petitions to make sure that there was a “constitutional guarantee of protection of American citizens” and over 2000 citizens in Tijuana signed the petition.212 The American businessmen and Americans expressed their concerns about the potential economic losses from the curfew. Now the American government had to consider not only the moral benefits, but also the economic consequences of the curfew. In Tijuana, the economic damages from the curfew on their economy were the primary concern of the businessmen. Tijuana civic and business associations were nervous about the curfew. During the Prohibition Era, ‘tourism provided Mexico with its second largest source of foreign exchange, and Tijuana businessmen feared losing millions of dollars of income.’213 Therefore, there was a desire for there to be government intervention to try and get the curfew lifted.

The Baja California officials were not happy with how they were being treated by their American counterparts. In the wake of the curfew, Governor Rodriguez of Baja California declared that he was out of patience with what he called “unwarranted attacks on his

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210 *San Diego Union*, February 19th, 1926
211 *Los Angeles Times*, February 20th, 1926
212 ibid
213 De Baca Dissertation, 231.
administration of affairs and issued a statement which he had decided to recommend the closing of Mexicali and Tijuana as ports of entry. They are the principal ports of entry into California from Mexico and the statement was in response to the outgrowth of the Peteet case in Tijuana. 

The Mexican officials were enraged by the sanctions which were imposed on them by the American government and therefore were only left with the option of proving the defendant’s innocence in the court of law. The political boundary meant that the Peteet case was to be played out under the Mexican court system, even though the Peteet’s were American and their suicides took place in San Diego. Since the incidents happened in Tijuana redirected the moral outrage away from the Peteet family and from their involvement/responsibility to Mexico. It was the Mexican court system that had to conduct the trial and face the media attention rather than the United States.

The U.S. experiment with the early closing hours both revealed border controls and the difficulty of untangling the social, political and economic spaces that overlapped and intersected the border. There was discontent from both sides of the border and a desire for there to be an alteration in the curfew. However, there were no changes to the closing times along the border and it was unlikely any were going to be made until the end of the Peteet trial. Therefore, the border continued to remain closed and the Peteet trial in late June was highly anticipated from everyone involved economically, socially or politically along the border.

During the six month period between the Peteet suicides and the trial there were changes in Tijuana. The name of the hotel where “Amador was alleged to have the younger Peteet girl had been changed since the case broke into print. So did the name of the Oakland Bar, formerly operated by Amador and in which it is alleged the girls were drugged. Some of the saloons had

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214 San Diego Union, February 26th, 1926
been closed and some of the objectionable features of the red-light district have been eliminated. Even the name of Tijuana had been changed. The municipality was changed to the city of Zaragoza, in the county of Tijuana.”

However, the Peteet suicides stayed out of the news until the day before the trial in Tijuana.

The Peteet trial represented the last chapter in the suicides case. The Peteet family returned to front page news after six months since the suicides was last reported on by the Los Angeles Times and San Diego Union on February 25th, 1926. The San Diego Union was the newspaper that provided the most comprehensive coverage of the trial and used the title when first breaking the trial as, “PETEET CASE TO OPEN IN TIJUANA” with the subheading “Five Mexicans face charge of attack on Girls.” The article goes onto to refresh the readers of the Union of the events which took place to the Peteet family during their trip to Tijuana. The presiding judge Santarino Urias, started proceedings at “11:00 a.m. at the Zaragoza Mutualist Center in Tijuana. Subpoenas were issued in the morning to eighty Mexican citizens who are to form the venire from which twelve jurors are to be drawn. Of the twelve selected nine will form the jury while the other three be alternatives to serve only in case of accident to the others.”

The trial was due to begin the following day and gave the two sides the opportunity to review their material before the testimonies started taking place. Within the July 27th San Diego Union edition was a poster containing the main characters in the trial. In the poster below the person in the “upper left, Judge Santurino Urias, who will preside at the trial; upper center, Zenaldo Llanos, ex-police chief and one of the defendants; upper right, Carolos Robles Linares, district

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215 San Diego Union, July 27th, 1926
216 The newspapers were reporting Governor Rodriguez of Baja California’s declaration that he was going to recommend to President Calles of Mexico that there should be the closing of key Mexican ports. This was in response to what Governor Rodriguez feeling that the United States was being too harsh on Mexico and that the newspapers were misrepresenting the Peteet case by putting the blame on Tijuana.
217 San Diego Union, July 27th, 1926
218 ibid
attorney of Tijuana; center left, the hall where the trial will be held; lower left, Juan B. Uribe, attorney of Luis Amador; lower right, Antonio Castellanos, attorney for Llanos.”

Figure 12 – Poster of main characters in trial

On July 28th the trial began and there was much anticipation over what the defendants stories were going to say in their testimonies. Alvarez and Amador freely admitted relations with one of the girls, but Llanos denied any intimacy. Llanos said “he had been drinking the night in question.” Witnesses said that Mrs. Peteet’s “agonized and unsuccessful search for her girls told of the fruitless appeals to the police for the aid and related the ways in which she was steered away from the rooms where her daughters were with strangers.” Thomas Peteet was pictured as so intoxicated the nights the girls went to rooms with strangers the he couldn’t aid his

219 San Diego Union, July 27th, 1926
220 ibid
221 San Diego Union, July 28th, 1926
222 ibid
wife in search of their daughters. Clyde, who spent the night with Amador and Alvarez,“threatened to kill herself because Luis had left her after taking her away from her family, one witness testified. The girl was apparently searching the room for a knife to cut her veins, it was said.”

Episodes during the five days the Peteet family spent in Tijuana were related by witnesses, several of whom pictured Peteet as a man who was drunk all of the time. The girls were represented as “entertainers looking for jobs according the testimonies of the witnesses on the defense.”

The defendant’s attorney’s all claimed that there was no one to prove that the crimes had been committed. “Amador’s attorney said there was nothing to show that the girl didn’t offer sex voluntarily with his clients at Tijuana, and the same contention was made by Alvarez’s counsel. Ex-chief Llanos’ attorneys said there were no persons to testify against him and there was no proof of the charges he is facing.”

This was always going to be a difficult obstacle for the prosecution to overcome. Since the Peteet families had taken their lives and were unable to give testimonies it was going to be tough to question the defense. Therefore, the fate of the Peteet case came down to the jury’s and Judge Urias’s view on the testimonies given by the defendant’s and prosecution. Luis Amador was the first to give his official testimony:

Clyde Peteet went to the room with me willingly. I was in the Oakland bar at about 7 when the Peteet’s came in Peteet was drunk. Mrs. Peteet was not with them. They were sitting there when Llanos came by and had a drink. Peteet noticed his badge and asked who he was. I told him I was the chief. I had to interpret for them. Peteet invited the chief into their booth and they talked about dancing and kept on drinking and chatting. They invited me to take a few drinks. The chief was dancing with one of the daughters and Peteet asked me if I danced and I said I did. He then asked “why don’t you dance with my daughter?” I did dance with Clyde and told me she was very happy that she had come in. She said she didn’t know she could fall in love with anyone at first sight as she did.

San Diego Union, July 28th, 1926

ibid

223 ibid

225 ibid
with me. Peteet left the saloon at around 9 pm and Llanos disappeared with one of the girls, both seeming happy. When I closed the saloon Clyde was there alone. She said didn’t want to go to the hotel where they were staying because her father was very drunk. I asked if she wanted to go to a hotel and she said that is just what she wanted to do. I told her to wait until I made up the cash and I would go with her. When we left we got in my car and I would go with her. When we left we got in my car and went over to the Nacional hotel where I had rented a room. When I left her she told me to eat. I told Alvarez eat. I told Alvarez what had happened; that we had been on a party and he said “I know the family very well.” He said that they had made love to him and had been making love to others.226

After Amador finished his testimony Judge Urias asked “Didn’t you know the girls were with their father and mother” and Amador answered “Well, I didn’t have all of my five senses with me that night.”227 The district attorney of Baja California Linares asked why Amador falsely answered a query about the girl’s whereabouts when someone came to the hotel asking for her. Amador responded that “he had done so because the girl had asked him not to. Amador emphasized that the girl wasn’t drunk, but might have been under the influence.”228 Refugio Alvarez followed Amador and described his involvement with Clyde:

He told about visiting the Nacional hotel room after Amador had left and said that he brought in a bottle of whiskey at the girls request. He admitted offences with Clyde that night and declared it was not the first time, stating that he and a San Bernardino had gone out with the sisters the night before. They came down to see if they could get jobs as entertainers. I sent up a breakfast for the girl, but the waiter stopped and ate it. Later I met Peteet looking for the girls the next morning and was mad because he couldn’t find them. I had heard him several times to take drinks.229

After Alvarez went to the stand, Llanos was the next witness called to the stand. He told of being introduced to the Peteet family and said that after a few drinks Audrey Peteet wanted some air and he took her out in his car to Tijuana Hot Springs. One of his men, Francisco Gonzales, drove the car. Llanos then elaborated on the story once they arrived at the Tijuana Hot Springs hotel:

226 San Diego Union, July 28th, 1926
227 ibid
228 ibid
229 ibid
We went there and had some drinks and dances. The girl was sick and I asked the policemen to take her to a room. I kept on dancing and drinking with another party that came to the Tijuana Hot Springs. An hour or so later Mrs. Peteet came and asked for the girl. I told her I didn’t know where she was. Later, we brought the girl down and sent her to Tijuana. I stayed at the Hot Springs Hotel for a time, then took a bath and went home. I did not stay in the room with the girl as she was drunk. The girl had been hugging and kissing me.  

Francisco Gonzales, who was facing a lighter charge than the others, told of taking Audrey and the chief of police to the Springs Hotel and of bringing her back and depositing her on the street near the hotel. Francisco Gonzales, bartender at Amador’s bar, related his version of events occurring before and after the Peteet family had arrived at the bar. The mother appeared after the party had left, saying she was worried and would go and look for the girls. Gonzales continued to elaborate on time with Amador and Clyde:

Then I met Amador and he told me to take a sandwich to his woman at the hotel. I went in and she asked me why Luis couldn’t come. Then she threw the sandwich at the floor and said ‘I want Luis. He has taken me away from my family.’ It was at this point when Clyde sought a knife to slash her veins.

Amador testified again saying “he couldn’t understand why Clyde would want to commit suicide.” The manager of the “Nacional hotel, Juan York Sang, told of Amador and Clyde coming to the hotel and registering. He said both were drunk, but seemed very happy.” The first woman witness to speak at the trial was Mrs. Marie Anderson, landlady at the hotel where the Peteet’s stayed. She said “Peteet was drunk most of the time after his arrival on January 30th. Mrs. Peteet complained of this frequently, but declared that she saw no improper conduct by the

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230 San Diego Union, July 28th, 1926
231 ibid
232 ibid
233 ibid
After the end of Mrs. Anderson’s testimony concluded the first day of the trial with the prosecution getting the floor the following today.

The *San Diego Union* reported that on July 29\textsuperscript{th} the prosecutors took the stage at the Peteet trial. Dan Conlogue, co-worker of Thomas Peteet, testified to the family’s good behavior and paid testimony to their moral character. The Peteet family depositions were read to the jury and seemed to be the main piece of evidence for the prosecution. The depositions were meant to be the voice of the Peteet family describing their experiences while in Tijuana. The depositions were taken by Immigration Officer Hannah who was unable to attend the trial, but his recording of the Peteet family’s account of the events which took place in Tijuana were meant to be the defense’s primary evidence. However, the validity of the depositions was always going to be issues as the Peteet’s were not present to validify their statements. Therefore, the prosecution had to look upon other witnesses to help build up their case. However, the prosecution responded with witnesses who testified to the good nature of ex-chief of Police Llanos. “Eight former firefighters, bartenders, former policemen and saloon keepers, testified that ex-chief Llanos always had been a good character as far as they knew.”

With the presentation of the testimonies the taking of evidence from witnesses was closed. The defense and prosecution were able to lay out their cases for the final time in front of Judge Urias. The court was then closed for the day and the verdict for the Peteet case was to be announced the next morning.

*The San Diego Union* reported the results of the trial in their July 30\textsuperscript{th}, 1926 edition with the title reading “Mexicans freed in Peteet case.” Judge Urias claimed that there “was insufficient evidence for a conviction and would not be influenced by the media when making

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\footnote{San Diego Union, July 28\textsuperscript{th}, 1926}
\footnote{San Diego Union, July, 29\textsuperscript{th}, 1926}
\footnote{San Diego Union, July 30\textsuperscript{th}, 1926}
\end{footnotesize}
his ruling." The reactions of the prosecution and defense were significantly different. The Union reported when the “verdict was announced pandemonium broke out in the courtroom. Laughing and clapping hands the friends and relatives of the accused men rushed where they were sitting and kissed and embraced them. In the forefront of the throng of admirers rushing to congratulate the acquitted men was Mrs. Amador, wife of Luis. It was her first courtroom appearance." However, there was a sense of resignation amongst the prosecution. The San Diego Union reported that “spectators at the trial noticed the apparent lack of interest on the part of prosecution. This may have been due to the inability to gather evidence. Those who spoke loudest during the Peteet case did not try to aid the Mexican officials in prosecuting the Llanos and his associates. The Mexicans also couldn’t subpoena them across the border line.” The trial in Tijuana was far less dramatic than the initial hearings in February. The nature of the suicides caused there to be a pressure for more justice to be imposed on those guilty, but legally it was going to be difficult for a prosecution to build up a case as the Peteet’s had taken their lives. Therefore, for all of the media attention which the suicides received in the United States and Baja California the court case turned out to be straightforward.

The result of the trial perhaps showed that had the same events happened in the United States the Peteet family’s case may not have gone to trial. It would have been interesting to see whether or not the Peteet’s might have been blamed or portrayed as causing their own demise by the American media. Whether one believed that the alleged events which happened to the Peteet family were true or whether Thomas Peteet went seeking adventure in Tijuana does not take away from the significance of the “Shame Suicides.” The “Shame Suicides” showed that now

237 San Diego Union, July 30th, 1926
238 Ibid
239 Ibid
morality was an integral part of the borderland culture unlike during the beginning of Prohibition. There was now a moral responsibility on the Mexican government to look after the well-being of American tourists and failure to do so would result in economic punishment.
Conclusion

The borderland curfew persisted until 1933 when U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt lifted it as well as Prohibition. However, during the period of 1926-1935, though, Tijuana achieved a ‘golden age despite ineffective U.S. sanctions.’ This showed that the curfew did little to clean up Tijuana or stop Americans from venturing across the border. People were still going to enjoy the vice life of Tijuana despite the suicides and government warnings which had been given to the public. The Peteet suicides were a shocking event for many demonstrated the dangers of the vice life of the United States and Mexico border. The newspaper articles, personal accounts of the suicides, and the events leading up to them were truly shocking and certainly enhanced the scandalous life which the Tijuana had a reputation for during Prohibition. Millions of ‘Americans escaped the American Laws in Tijuana saloons, casinos, brothels, and opium dens’ which led to as many as ‘180,000 people a day swarming across to Tijuana.’ These huge numbers of people and the raunchy stories were what attracted the Peteet family to Tijuana and eventually led to their shocking death.

However, despite their deaths and the trial process which followed tourism growth didn’t change in Tijuana. If anything, historians have argued it entered its Golden Age. In the end, despite the sanctions imposed on Mexico by the United States the tourism industry was too vibrant and appealing to prevent Americans from going to Tijuana. The Peteet suicides only brought the potential consequences of enjoying vice life to the public, but the American government could do little to prevent it from growing. As New York Times writer T.J.C Martyn wrote reflecting on the Peteet suicides, “there have been killings and worse … but the spice of

241 ibid
danger adds a zest to the pleasure of thousands who visit them [casinos and bars] from this side of the frontier.” The “Shame Suicides” emphasized why the American government imposed Prohibition. The dangers of vice industries were brought out for the public to see during the media coverage of the Peteet case. By influencing a ‘curfew’ the American government showed that they were unwilling to be associated with the immoral activities which took place in Mexico during Prohibition.

The “Shame Suicides” showed the progression of the borderlands from the Mexican-American War in 1848 to Prohibition in the 1920’s. The development of the borderland was initially based off of mutual economic expansion. Since there was mutual interest in the development of the borderland economy the relations between the American and Mexican governments were at a respectable level. However, once American investment began taking away Mexican peasants jobs there was an outcry for change. While the American investment was able to benefit the Mexican economy it came at a cost. The Mexican Revolution from 1910-1920 showed the rise of nationalism in Mexico and desire to develop an economy free from American investment. The Constitution of 1917 specifically outlined methods to promote agricultural, mining and ranching programs which would give the Mexican peasants jobs free from American control. There was a desire to issue moral reforms in Mexico to clean up the country after the bloody and economically crushing Revolutionary War. The rise of nationalism in Mexico was met with negative feelings in the United States who in response put up fences along the border. There was now not only a political and economic divide between the United States and Mexico, but now a physical divide.

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Prohibition offered a chance for the borderlands economy to become resurrected. Mexico had gathered up a large amount of debt during the Revolution. Therefore, there was a need to stabilize the economy. The increase in potential revenue from tourism made it a tempting solution for President Obregón. By turning a blind eye to the vice activities which took place in Tijuana Obregón placed economic prosperity over moral values. This strictly contradicted the rest of his reforms which were taking place in Mexico at the same time, but there was a need for economic growth. During Prohibition the borderlands became a morally based boundary.

The Peteet family represented the American tourists who went to Tijuana for the vice activities which were banned in America during Prohibition. However, the alleged kidnapping, rape and drugging of the Peteet daughters brought into the public spectrum the tense borderlands relations between the United States and Mexico. The peculiar nature of the Peteet family’s suicides caused it to become a media sensation even if similar events had happened before in Tijuana. The “Shame Suicides” created a variety of political, economic and moral questions about the nature of the border and who was to blame for the alleged crimes against the Peteet family. The “Shame Suicides” brought to attention the transition which the borderlands went from an area with mutual economic interest to one which represented a strict moral divide between the United States and Mexico.
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