

*“The Chamizal dispute... the settling of a very delicate boundary dispute between two nations with very, very different backgrounds.”*

— J. Samuel Moore, El Paso Attorney.

This past year, the news has been constantly buzzing over the security of the United States southern border with Mexico. The conflict stirring in the media encouraged our group to investigate the Southern Border’s history. After some preliminary research, we learned that the Texas and Mexican border created a lasting feud over a piece of land called El Chamizal. This dispute between the United States and Mexico began after major flooding caused The Rio Grande to drift southward. A compromise would not be reached until President Lyndon Johnson of the United States and President Lopez Mateos of Mexico signed the Chamizal Convention Treaty of 1963.

We began our research by gathering primary information from the Chamizal National Memorial. We were provided with timelines and access to other valuable sources. The National Park Service kindly granted us access to The Chamizal Oral History Project, which supplied us with valuable interviews of citizens and important figures involved in the Chamizal conflict and compromise. We also accessed primary articles and journals at the Fondren Library at Rice University. Attorney J. Samuel Moore, Jr. described how “the Chamizal was put on the back burner“ of the United States’ issues because of world wars and oil expropriations. We collected oral histories from the University of Texas at El Paso and the Library of Congress. The *Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training* primary interviews detailing past foreign relations between Mexico and the United States. Press conferences from John F. Kennedy’s presidential library allowed our group to understand the role of the federal government during the 1960s compromise. President Kennedy was dedicated to ending the Chamizal conflict, and believed he if the United States came to “a solution, it [would] wipe out a black mark in the record of the United States.”

The Chamizal conflict can be shown with maps of the Rio Grande’s consistent moving prior to the 1968 channel’s construction. Noting this, we decided to portray our

project with an exhibit board. After writing our captions, we coordinated them with images of headlines, maps, and key figures of the Chamizal.

Our topic fits this year's theme, *Conflict and Compromise*, because two powerful countries were able to settle a century-long disagreement in spite of their tension. From 1848 to 1963, a conflict simmered between the United States and Mexico. By 1964, avulsion of the Rio Grande resulted in the United States gaining Mexican land. According to the *Houston Chronicle*, the "dispute over ownership of the Chamizal [left] a thorn in Mexican-American relations since the wandering Rio Grande changed course." This thorn "deepened when arbitration was attempted and ultimately failed in 1911." During the Cold War, the Chamizal conflict posed a greater threat to the United States as a path for communism, yet a compromise was reached in 1963. In its historical effect, the Chamizal compromise stood not only as a resolution for a century of conflict, but also as a political milestone for the United States and Mexico. The establishment of the Chamizal National Memorial "innovated the way countries handle foreign affairs," and it forever "celebrates the culture, history, and heritage of the U.S. and Mexico" according to the Mexico Borderland U.S. Customs and Border Protection. El Chamizal established the only national park to fly the flags of two countries, and it epitomized the ability of two nations to come together in peace rather than through war.