Colorado's Tortilla Curtain: Inventing a Borderland at the Junction of Two Wests

Abstract

In the high desert of southern Colorado a no man’s land of sand and sagebrush separates not only two cities but also two radically different Wests. To the north is Colorado Springs and the Anglo Rocky Mountain West, a West of postcard-perfect resorts, modern architecture, high-tech industries, sprawling suburbs, white collars, and mega-church Protestantism. To the south is Pueblo and the Hispanic Southwest, a West of flat deserts and wind-whipped sagebrush, Indians, Mexicans, enormous prisons, ancient adobe ruins, and Roman Catholics. Residents of Pueblo refer to this boundary, corresponding to the Pueblo-El Paso county line, as the “Tortilla Curtain,” a poignant reference to the international border between the United States and Mexico. This dissertation seeks to explain the interplay of space, environment, and culture that led to the creation, enforcement, and normalization of Colorado’s Tortilla Curtain, a broad band dividing the state north and south—a kind of internal international border born of myth, custom, and practice that created and sustained profound social, political, and racial inequalities. Colorado’s Tortilla Curtain was an invention of the late nineteenth century, a conception of Anglos seeking both to understand dramatic changes in the landscape and imbue those changes with powerful moral and economic values. In the twentieth century, labor, ethnic, and racial violence in southern Colorado led to the policing of the boundary as Coloradans increasingly saw the Tortilla Curtain as a divide between white and brown. The expansion of federal funding and power in the West during the Great Depression and World War II normalized these perceived differences and enforced them with changes in the built environment. Ultimately these differences in government investment on either side of the Tortilla Curtain portrayed Pueblo as an ancient relic of a mythological Mexican past while Colorado Springs rose to become the state’s preeminent showplace for sleek, space-age modernity. The city became a prototype of the affluent Rocky Mountain resorts of outdoor leisure that defined the state in the twentieth century. Meanwhile, Pueblo remained a gritty industrial city and home to one of the most diverse ethnic and racial populations in the West. Despite being Colorado’s second-largest city for most of its history, Pueblo—like much of southern Colorado—became incompatible with popular portrayals of the Centennial State. This dissertation engages several historical fields, including borderlands, the American West, urban history, environmental history, and architectural history. Because a border and borderland are primarily spatial phenomena, this dissertation relies on analyses of the natural and built environments, particularly architectural analysis. It also promotes the significance of secondary cities in environmental and urban history.

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this against middleclass suburbanite values. At the labour exchange, where mainly white employers find temporary employees for any variety of menial labour-intensive tasks, America meets another Mexican man in a poncho and immediately senses evil within him. This man and his friend eventually rape America, and they are often somewhere on the scene of crimes committed in Arroyo Blanco. The Tortilla Curtain book. Read 2,988 reviews from the world's largest community for readers. Topanga Canyon is home to two couples on a collision course... Get a look at the other side of your office cleaning lady's life, the reality of that small dark man with the leaf blower or stacking the shelves in your local Wal-Mart. You owe to yourself. ...more. flag 31 likes · Like · see review. Through shifting narrative perspective, The Tortilla Curtain traces the intersecting lives of two couples living in Los Angeles, California. The first couple, Delaney and Kyra Mossbacher, are well-to-do white Americans living in the private community of Arroyo Blanco Estates; Delaney is a nature writer, Kyra a realtor. While at the supermarket one day, Delaney has an encounter with Jack Jardine, who tries to convince him to support the gate. Delaney initially challenges Jack, calling him out for his racist views, but later, in the parking lot, seems to rethink his views when he spots Cándido, whom he instinctively thinks of as a “dark alien little man.”