

2. Walls

The chapter "Walls" explores the complex history and significance of the U.S.-Mexico border. The author reflects on a time when the border was non-existent, characterized by open landscapes and unmarked territory. This nostalgia is contrasted with the harsh realities of the modern border, described as a "Death Star," symbolizing barriers erected in the name of immigration control and national identity.

The narrative begins with a historical account of a group of emigrants traveling west in the 1840s, led by a young teamster named Antonio. Their tragic journey into what was then Mexican territory illustrates the hubris of American expansion. Antonio's story culminates in tragedy during the infamous Donner Party incident, where desperate measures lead to cannibalism—highlighting the dark side of the American frontier and its complex relationship with Mexican and Native peoples.

The subsequent establishment of the U.S.-Mexico border is described as a product of competitive colonial expansion, with the border marked by obelisks and later fortified by fences and walls. The transformation of the border from a mere marker to a militarized zone reflects societal fears of "otherness," particularly toward Latino immigrants. This sentiment, borne from a historical legacy of racism and exclusion, shapes modern perceptions of Latino identity and immigration.

As the chapter unfolds, it delves into the dual nature of U.S. identity—where a reliance on immigrant labor coexists with fear and hostility towards immigrants. Historical examples illustrate this contradiction, starting from the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882 to the tightening of immigration laws for Latin American nations post-1965.

The narrative concludes with poignant reflections on personal experiences at the border, particularly the experiences of Gloria Itzel Montiel, who symbolizes the struggle of undocumented immigrants navigating their identities amid the overwhelming presence of walls. Ultimately, the chapter presents the border as both a physical barrier and a metaphor for deeper social divisions, racial myths, and human struggles deeply embedded in U.S. history.