This case study is of a border born from United States conquest and colonization that affected ethnic Mexican identity in the Lower Rio Grande Valley from 1900 to 1930. For simplicity, I use “ethnic Mexican” as a means to describe people of Mexican and México Texano cultural descent (Gutiérrez 1995:218, endnote 3). The Lower Rio Grande Valley is presently composed of Starr, Hidalgo, Cameron, and Willacy counties in the southern tip of Texas along the United States/Mexico border. The intent of this study is to examine how the United States/Mexico border affected ethnic Mexican group identity during a specific period. Group identities are how people unify themselves in relation to other groups of people. Three group identities existed from 1900 to 1930. They included the México Texano, Mexicano, and México Americano. The first two existed in 1900, while the last emerged by the 1920s. Identities by their nature are hybrid, but for analytical purposes this study traces the history of the border’s effect on the existent México Texano and Mexicano identities (not their hybrid nature), and the emergence of the México Americano (hybrid) identity. By analyzing the border’s affect on group identities over time, hybridity as a process is examined.
The change from an open border to a closed border led to the emergence of the México Americano identity by the 1920s – an identity that differed from the México Texano and Mexicano identities. The terms “open” and “closed” are not utilized in the literal sense. Instead, “open” denotes a border easily crossed without a clear sense of national spaces, and “closed” denotes a border policed and difficult to cross with a clear sense of national spaces. It is the contention of this case study that the México Texano and Mexicano group identities that existed in 1900 continued and changed by the 1920s, with some members of the former engaging in a reconstruction forming a new identity, México Americano, and the latter maintaining its identity. The change from an open border to a closed border occurred as a result of structural forces and human agency. It is important to note that this is not a structural history of a border affecting passive persons, but a historical analysis of structural forces and human agency as intertwined processes.

**Theory and Concepts**

A relational paradigm of identity centers my conception of group identity. How members of a group viewed themselves and their relations to another group as a means of centering their location within the world provides the best avenue for interrogating the meaning-making phenomena behind the labels groups of people used to identify themselves (Maines 2000, Lamont 2000). My methodology focuses on tracing the use of the labels México Texano, Mexicano, and México Americano as they appeared in printed documents. These texts include Spanish language newspapers, books, political speeches, letters, music lyrics, names of *mutualistas* (community-based mutual aid societies), and the English language version of these labels in contemporary scholarly works from 1900 to 1930. The use of these labels by various authors dispersed over space and time indicate their discursive power as identifiers. In essence, I accept that these labels truly reflected the ethnic Mexican community’s internal sense of group identities.

An international border between two nation-states is a material and discursive phenomenon with a transnational history. Particular activities occur at border locations that do not happen at the center of a nation-state, such as cross-border commerce and immigration. Nationalism and citizenship as discourses also harden in border locations. An international border is a loca-