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## Hypothetical geography : constituting limits on a new American frontier

 [Download](#)**Author:** Friedman, Nathan C. (Nathan Carlson)**Citable URI:** <http://hdl.handle.net/1721.1/99274>**Other Contributors:** Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Department of Architecture.**Advisor:** Ana Miljački.**Department:** Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Department of Architecture.**Publisher:** Massachusetts Institute of Technology**Date Issued:** 2015**Abstract:**

Two hundred fifty-nine obelisk monuments mark the United States-Mexico boundary line west of the Rio Grande. Constructed in three distinct phases (1848-1857, 1891-1896, and 1964-1968) the monuments were the product of territorial negotiations; disputes settled ranging from the violent expansion of sovereign limits to the shifting course of a historic boundary river. Commissioned, inscribed, and placed by both the United States and Mexico, border monuments served as unique bilateral artifacts operating across and reflecting on separate territories and philosophies of nationhood. Beyond symbol, such artifacts were fictions of federal accuracy presented as fact. The monuments served as evidence that a theoretical boundary line existed. Each held a hypothetical narrative of place and placing despite varied geographic realities, too often mired in instrumental imprecision, subjective viewpoints, and historic inaccuracies. In the case of the United States and Mexico, constitution of the two republics required a calibration of the real and representational. While this stitching was required for the solidification of nineteenth century nation states, it also calls into question the foundation of territorial division between the countries and provides insight on a region defined by the cyclical reassertion of international limits. This thesis frames the bilateral production of border monuments and the modes of representation they motivated. It positions these artifacts as instrumental to the constitution of the United States-Mexico border, orchestrating the synthesis of national views and topographies. The monuments straddle a rich gap between the real and representational, the analysis of which reveals an evolution of the international boundary from single line to geopolitical territory.

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In order to simplify the interpretation process, this paper firstly presents an analytical framework for interpretation of four classical geopolitical theories; secondly, focuses on interpretation of "The Geographical Pivot of History" put forward by Mackinder according to the analytical framework; finally, critically summarizes the four classical geopolitical theories. Through the critical interpretation, this paper draws a conclusion that there are the scientific, hypothetical and conceptual classical geopolitical theories. The construction of classical geopolitical theories is based on the In the thesis, the American frontier established liberty by releasing Americans from European mindsets and eroding old, dysfunctional customs. The frontier had no need for standing armies, established churches, aristocrats or nobles, nor for landed gentry who controlled most of the land and charged heavy rents. Frontier land was free for the taking. Turner's emphasis on the importance of the frontier in shaping American character influenced the interpretation found in thousands of scholarly histories. By the time Turner died in 1932, 60% of the leading history departments in the U.S. were teaching courses in frontier history along Turnerian lines.[3].