



# **Border Boss: Manuel B. Bravo and Zapata County (Canseco-Keck History Series)**

*J. Gilberto Quezada*

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On January 1, 1937, Manuel B. Bravo was sworn in as county judge of Zapata County, a post he would hold for twenty years. In *Border Boss: Manuel B. Bravo and Zapata County*, J. Gilberto Quezada delineates Bravo's political career in the Democratic Party and examines his role in some of the important issues of his day, especially Falcon Dam.

During Bravo's years in office, he worked and corresponded with many Texas and national politicians, including James Allred, Lloyd Bentsen, Kika de la Garza, Ralph Yarborough, and, most prominently, Lyndon Johnson. The association between Bravo and Johnson began with the special Senate election of 1941 and is reflected in the more than fifty letters between the two in Bravo's personal papers. In Johnson's 1948 Senate runoff against Coke Stevenson, voting irregularities were alleged in Zapata County when the election returns from Precinct No. 3 were reported missing. Quezada analyzes the Bravo papers for any evidence that Bravo and Johnson had arranged the disappearance and offers possible alternative explanations.

From the 1930s to the 1950s Zapata County was one of six South Texas counties where the Tejano majority dominated local politics and held most public offices. Bravo became known as one of the "Mexican bosses" of South Texas, but Quezada draws a more nuanced picture of bossism than has been presented previously, analyzing the role of influential leading families but looking as well at the degree of economic integration into the state and nation as factors in how bossism developed.

Those interested in Mexican-American studies and politics and bossism in South Texas will appreciate the window onto South Texas politics and Tejano culture this biography gives.

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