

# At the Border of Empires

## The Tohono O'odham, Gender, and Assimilation, 1880–1934

ANDRAE M. MARAK AND LAURA TUENNERMAN

*How one tribe faced assimilation on the border*

The story of the Tohono O'odham peoples offers an important account of assimilation. Bifurcated by a border demarcating Mexico and the United States that was imposed on them after the Gadsden Purchase in 1853, the Tohono O'odham lived at the edge of two empires. Although they were often invisible to the majority cultures of the region, they attracted the attention of reformers and government officials in the United States, who were determined to “assimilate” native peoples into “American society.” By focusing on gender norms and ideals in the assimilation of the Tohono O'odham, *At the Border of Empires* provides a lens for looking at both Native American history and broader societal ideas about femininity, masculinity, and empire around the turn of the twentieth century.

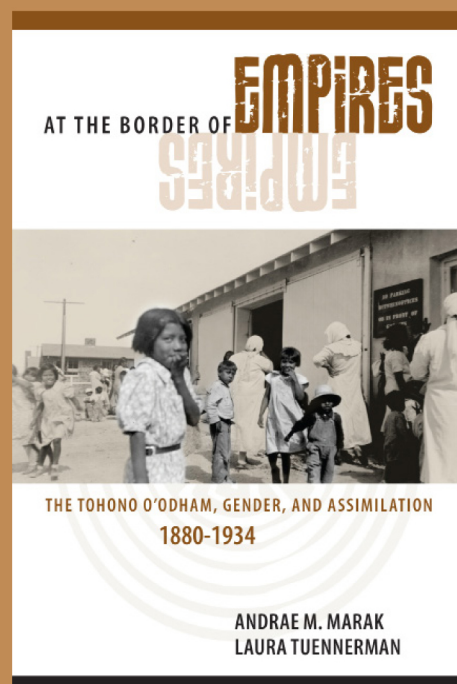
Beginning in the 1880s, the US government implemented programs to eliminate “vice” among the Tohono O'odham and to encourage the morals of the majority culture as the basis of a process of “Americanization.” During the next fifty years, tribal norms interacted with—sometimes conflicting with and sometimes reinforcing—those of the larger society in ways that significantly shaped both government policy and tribal experience. This book examines the mediation between cultures, the officials who sometimes developed policies based on personal beliefs and gender biases, and the native people whose lives were impacted as a result. These issues are brought into useful relief by comparing the experiences of the Tohono O'odham on two sides of a border that was, from a native perspective, totally arbitrary.

**Andrae M. Marak** is a chair of humanities and social sciences and a professor of history and political science at Governors State University. He is the co-editor (with Elaine Carey) of *Smugglers, Brothels, and Twine: Historical Perspectives on Contraband and Vice in North America's Borderlands*.

**Laura Tuennerman** is Chair of the Department of History and Political Science, and a professor of history at California University of Pennsylvania. She is the author of *Helping Others, Helping Ourselves*.

*“The archival research and the chapter on Mexico are especially welcome since few works have examined the Tohono O'odham living on both sides of the border. The book also offers excellent insights into the role that gender played in the United States' assimilation policy and indigenous responses do it.”*—Eric Meeks, author of *Border Citizens: The Making of Indians, Mexicans, and Anglos in Arizona*

*“Marak and Tuennerman focus on the gendered dimensions of efforts to assimilate the Tohono O'odham, a nation of people that have lived in what we now call the borderlands for over a millennium.”*—Jeffrey Shepherd, author of *We Are an Indian Nation: A History of the Hualapai People*



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