Reimagining the Camino Real or King’s Highway in East Texas

Carla Gerona
Associate Professor, Georgia Tech
USA

Abstract

Spanish expeditions first blazed the “Camino Real” or “King’s Highway” by following Indigenous peoples into east Texas and west Louisiana. During the eighteenth century, numerous European immigrants – French, Spanish, English, German, and others -- traveled this road, or more accurately roads. Non-European migrants included immigrant Indians, such as the Cherokee, and people of African descent – most, forcibly transported; a few, free or fugitive. These stories are not told on highway markers. The signs and posts instead commemorate the earliest heroic governors and devoted missionaries.

The Daughters of the American Republic (DAR) and the State of Texas began to mark the “King’s Highway” with wooden posts in 1915 and replaced these with pink marble slabs in 1918. Throughout the twentieth-century local, state, and national organizations added their own heritage signs along the route – often about later Anglo-Texan revolutionaries. The fascination with such markings has continued into the digital era, for example, with the 2016 website that details all the extant DAR memorials and examines whether they are correctly positioned. But the internet also offers an opportunity to reimagine the route and create different markers. Why not tell other stories of migration along the different caminos reales?

The main point of this paper will be to start to formulate a visual counter-narrative to the “King’s Highway.” My goal is to plan a digital exhibit that creates different kinds of marks, informed by years or research in Spanish archival material, new paradigms for understanding the borderlands, and my recent work in museum studies. In short, I will be creating an alternate set of markers that interrogates and complicates traditional narratives and tells the stories of the women, runaways, soldiers, common-folk, and Indians who also migrated along the various caminos that extended beyond Texas to Louisiana and Mexico.