



Physical Anthropology Section – 2006

H70 Forensic Anthropology and the Current Politics of the USMexico Border

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The goal of this study is to identify the current and forthcoming U.S. immigration policies that have an influence on border deaths and to discuss the potential impact of these policies on the forensic anthropology community. This research highlights the capability of forthcoming policies to prevent deaths along the U.S. Mexico border and the political sway that forensic anthropologists can exert to stop border deaths and continue repatriations

This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by pinpointing current and upcoming policies that may heavily impact the numbers of border deaths, providing up to date information on what these effects might be, and clarifying pathways to action for forensic anthropologists working on the border.

Immigrant deaths on the U.S.-Mexico border pose a tremendous problem to U.S. death investigators. Third-world nations like Mexico lack the appropriate databases for missing persons to which U.S. investigators are accustomed. The U.S.-Mexico border has long been a popular gateway of entry for immigrants attempting to enter the U.S. economic system and has consequently been the site of a number of crossing-related deaths. Motivated by a Mexico-U.S economic discrepancy of more than 8: 1, undocumented immigrant workers from Mexico are a cheap, readily available labor pool. As non-citizens, immigrant workers have been historically considered a docile community existing beyond the law. It is under this pretense that these individuals have been systematically incorporated into the economic fabric of this nation for the cheap, often unregulated labor they provide. Revolutions of economic instability and threats of terrorism in the U.S. have encouraged the formation of regulatory national and state policies targeted at keeping undocumented immigrants from crossing the border. Unfortunately these policies have often increased both the dangers and numbers of deaths associated with the border. With border deaths on the rise, the forensic anthropological community must familiarize itself with the effects of enforcement policies, the ever changing demographics of undocumented border crossers, and proactive measures the forensic community can take to help stop border deaths.

In conjunction with an up to date assessment on border crossing demographics this analysis focuses on several key policies including IRCA, IIRIRA, the PATRIOT act, the Gatekeeper Complex, the Secure America Act, and AG jobs. Results from this policy analysis suggest that the current waves of immigration policy may have a highly negative impact on border deaths. The majority of current policies equate long time flows of immigrants from Mexico as a terrorist threat and systematically work to criminalize both legal and illegal immigrants, which effectively increases the numbers of border deaths. Only a few policies such as AG jobs and the Secure America Act demonstrate the potential to reduce the numbers of border deaths; unfortunately, these bills currently lack the support needed to pass.

A review of the literature demonstrates a dire lack of communication concerning the affect of current immigration policies on border areas. Statistics on county and state costs and numbers of deaths per area are highly variable in the literature. Forensic anthropologists working in border regions are in the ideal situation to bring the numbers and case accounts to policy makers and demonstrate the anthropological side of policy failure. While politics and policy has traditionally been out of the realm of forensic anthropology the current status of border deaths demonstrates the need for anthropologist to be up to date on immigration policy and active in policy change.

Immigration, Policy, Border Death