



FORGIVEN TRESPASSES

*Illegal aliens from around the world
expose America's vulnerabilities.*

STORY AND PHOTOS BY JEFF STOFFER

COYOTES ARE GATHERING. Their pickups and SUVs toss silver clouds into the desert twilight. Three sets of headlights, maybe four, bounce across the darkening expanse, all coming from different directions toward a run-down rancheria barely into Sonora. In a time not long ago but somehow forgotten, Mexican vaqueros herded cattle here, to within reach of U.S. markets. The corrals still stand, as do some weathered outbuildings. But cows are no longer driven to this place near the border. People are.

The rancheria is still, aside from shadows that sporadically flash in doorways or drift along fencelines. They come in and out of binocular sight until the gnarled Sierra Madre horizon fades to black, and generator lights flicker on and undulate, like tribal fire on the eve of war. U.S. homeowners two miles away look through their living-room windows and witness the scene, ordinary as the evening news – the coyotes, their headlights, the shadows, and another new shipment of flesh and blood.

Human smugglers known as “coyotes” perpetually feed more and more people into the United States from foreign lands and out of whatever unknown, unchecked circumstances they left behind. These migrants could be convicted felons or political refugees, narco-terrorists or sex slaves, tuberculars or teen-age

boys willing to scour toilets or mow lawns for minimum wage, or do more for less. They might come from South America, Asia, Africa or the Middle East. No matter who comes or from where, the door is open for a coyote’s price: \$1,500 a head for a typical Hispanic laborer, up to \$50,000 for a sojourner from a nation of

concern in the war on terrorism. They come in immeasurable waves to dozens of staging areas like the corrals south of Cochise County, Ariz., where the San Pedro River’s listless headwaters grow enough cottonwoods and willows to make good cover 140 miles into the United States. This is the soft underbelly of America’s

2,000-mile border with Mexico. Aliens who don’t die crossing the desert or get nabbed by authorities along the way funnel into southern Arizona, dump their backpacks in the bushes of remote “lay-up” areas and ride silently into the swelling underground of America’s undocumented. No one is certain in what number they are coming or how fast, where they are heading, or if they ever intend to go back. Coyotes don’t publish statistics.

Anecdotal evidence of illegal immigration’s impact, however, is mounting in places like Phoenix, where last winter’s string of “drop-house” busts astonished even the most alien-hardened Arizonans, people who have grown accustomed to seeing young men schooled up in parking lots of home-improvement stores, offering in broken English to perform household labor for handfuls of cash. In a two-week period last February, Phoenix police broke up 10 drop

houses where illegal immigrants were held captive, awaiting extortion money to pay their smugglers and keep the line moving in America. One-hundred fifty-nine immigrants were discovered living in filth, afraid to go outside, in one unfurnished home rented to coyotes. Seventy-eight were found under the roof of another, in a neighborhood where home values commonly hit \$400,000. One immigrant who emerged from a drop house told *The Arizona Republic* he was among about 100 who “were packed in there like a pack of cigarettes.” The raids did more than expose a few isolated examples of just how inhumane the illegal alien game has become; they produced rare hard numbers to illustrate a fast-changing social condition America does not – perhaps by choice – fully calculate.

Estimates that put the U.S. illegal-immigrant population somewhere between 8 million

and 12 million come from U.S. Census Bureau calculations that seem to assume undocumented foreigners dutifully fill out government forms and truthfully answer questions that could reveal their eligibility for deportation. According to those estimates, America’s illegal-immigrant population more than doubled in the last decade of the 20th century. Those who anxiously monitor such phenomena say the actual number of illegal aliens in our midst is much higher. Kathy McKee, director of an organization called Protect Arizona Now (PAN), which has campaigned this year for a ballot initiative requiring proof of citizenship of those seeking to vote or to receive welfare benefits, says she believes up to 30 million undocumented aliens are living in America. But no one really knows because they’re virtually impossible to count, like so many goldfish in a tank, moving anonymously from job to

Chris Simcox of Tombstone, Ariz., scans the washes south of the San Pedro River, looking for illegal aliens in transit to America. He says his civilian border patrol has assisted in the apprehension of more than 2,500 immigrants from foreign countries.



job, using pseudonyms, flashing counterfeit Social Security cards, fake work visas or illegally obtained driver's licenses. Undocumented immigrants also can sink pretty deeply into American society on their Mexico-issued matricula consular cards alone. Available to anyone with money, the cards are not always accepted as legal identification in Mexico, but they are good enough to open an American bank account. Critics of the cards say they are useful *only* to illegal immigrants because foreigners with real visas are required to carry other forms of U.S.-issued ID. An American auto dealer in Phoenix bought a Mexican matricula consular card over the Internet for \$80, just to prove he could. The card lists his birthplace as Tijuana, B.C.

To survive in the U.S. economy, undocumented workers materialize each morning before the eyes of potential employers who are increasingly compelled to solicit their cheap, dependable labor to stay competitive in industries from meatpacking to homebuilding. Illegal status undoubtedly leaves immigrants susceptible to labor abuse (according to one estimate, undocumented workers die on the job at more than double the rate of U.S. citizens), but the relationship has risks for employers, too, who can be prosecuted for failing to confirm the authenticity of work visas and for ignoring state and federal tax withholdings.

Hispanic laborers paid under the table will work hard and long in all kinds of weather, employers say – often at half the wages commanded by Americans, yet 10 times the pay in Mexico. They put in their hours. They are rewarded with cash. They buy groceries, drive cars, rent apartments and have babies. They are

a fast-growing consumer group, a target market whose dollars are coveted by a growing Spanish-language advertising industry, on billboards, radio, television and in print media. Immigrants annually wire back to Mexico billions of dollars, a point often repeated by those who defend illegal labor as an offset to the \$14 million to \$18 million in foreign aid sent to America's second-leading trade partner. The amount immigrants sent back to Mexico last year is estimated as high as \$17 billion, but there is no agreed-upon figure, and only conjecture about where the money actually goes. A good portion of it is known to feed the coyotes and pay for counterfeit credentials.

Once in America, illegal immigrants enroll their children in public schools and often can receive resident college tuition rates, while U.S. citizens from other states and foreigners here legally cannot. Children of illegal immigrants are blamed for straining public-education



Auto dealer Rusty Childress of Phoenix bought a Mexican matricula consular card for \$80 over the Internet.

budgets, lowering standardized test scores and raising dropout rates, if for no other reason than the language barrier. When sick or hurt, illegal aliens can take their problems to U.S.

hospitals and clinics, knowing they will receive treatment even if they don't have the ability – or inclination – to pay for it. They re-introduce to America previously controlled diseases like tuberculosis and cholera. Some file federal income tax returns and rake in huge refunds because, as low-paid parents of dependent children, they qualify for earned-income credits – one of many incentives for rapid procreation. U.S.-born “anchor

babies” are a ticket to citizenship for their parents, forging links in the blood chains that ultimately pull grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins and other relatives across the border. More than one third of those here illegally receive some form of public assistance. Illegal immigrants can register to vote in many states, over the Internet if so desired (one man in

A 2002 study of 48 terrorists revealed that at least 21 had violated U.S. immigration laws before taking part in terrorism activities.

– Center for Immigration Studies

Arizona registered his dog to vote, according to the PAN Website), and can cast ballots without proving citizenship or identity. Approxi-

mately 190,000 illegal aliens are in a U.S. jail at any given time. Some use bogus green cards to join the U.S. Armed Forces and become naturalized that way; more than 16,000 active-duty personnel last year reportedly had unknown citizen status. Others simply cling to their anonymity until the U.S. government tosses up an offer of amnesty, which is alarmingly inevitable, in one form or another. In that case, all is forgiven.

America is, after all, a nation of immigrants. Often, only a generation or two separates any of us from the poor, the tired, the huddled masses who booked steerage-class passage and wobbled seasick onto Ellis Island a half-century or more ago, or bobbed away from a Vietnam or a Cuba, in more recent years. So many are Americans today because someone before them left a home country and landed in a place that was more idea than location, an opportunity for things to be better, and they usually were. No other country welcomes more immigrants, legal or otherwise, than the United States, which makes room for at least 2 million a year and doubtless many more. That legacy is the basis of thinking for those who view immigration's newest manifestation as just another chapter in an ongoing American saga. But the story is much different now, or so it seems, since the events of Sept. 11, 2001.



A U.S. Border Patrol agent interviews a group of tired illegal immigrants alongside State Highway 80 between Douglas and Bisbee, Ariz. Apprehensions increased more than 50 percent in the first quarter of 2004, compared to the same period in 2003.

Immigration has always had an uncomfortable seat in the U.S. economic theater, but the terrorist attacks in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania – triggered in part by illegal aliens – amplified awareness of America's potential for exploitation by undocumented foreign enemies. The 21st-century economy suddenly can't be considered outside the context of illegal immigration's effects on wage suppression, unemployment and government budget deficits. Author Victor Davis Hanson writes in “Mexifornia: A State of Becoming” (2003, Encounter Press) that illegal migration into the U.S. economy from Mexico is no longer a cyclical phenomenon predicated by the seasonal needs of agriculture. The illegal immigrant, he argues, is coming to stay, with no intention of returning to a hopeless or dangerous home country, nor with much desire to assimilate into U.S. culture. And now, the illegal immigrant is not asked to assimilate. “The problem ... is the changing attitude toward immigration and assimilation – making too many of us separate and unequal,” Hanson writes. “It has always been easier for people who emigrate to keep their own culture than to join the majority

– if we have learned anything from our turn-of-the-century arrivals, it is that assimilation is difficult.” Furthermore, Hanson argues, America no longer requires assimilation.

Even more disturbing than socioeconomic shifts is the reality that America is now in its third year of an amorphous global war against suicidal anti-Western lunatics who know they can always hire a coyote and cross the desert with all the viruses, chemicals or nuclear devices that will fit in a backpack. Out in the vast sea of immigration statistics – however reliable they may be – float the estimated 78,000 aliens believed to be here from countries of questionable intentions in the war on terrorism. While most who arrive illegally do so from Latin America in order to find work, thousands from the Middle East, Africa, Europe and Asia also are caught each year at the border. Others are discovered later, after they have broken a more seriously enforced U.S. law. In “Invasion: How America Still Welcomes Terrorists, Criminals and Other Foreign Menaces to Our Shores” (2002, Regnery Publishing), author Michelle Malkin chronicles dozens of instances where thugs from foreign lands have waltzed into

the United States and committed crimes and atrocities from drug trafficking to murder, while business leaders, elected officials and the media stand idly by, unwilling to surrender political correctness for the sake of public safety.

It's not a race issue, says Malkin, a first-generation American and daughter of Filipino parents. “The demand for a more discriminating immigration policy – one that welcomes American Dreamers and bars American Destroyers – is rooted in love of country, not hatred of foreigners,” she writes. “One year after the terrorist attacks, the avenues for death and destruction remain virtually unobstructed.”

“At the border every night, it's like the Boston Marathon,” McKee says. “How do I know bin Laden isn't going to be in there? They don't know who's in there.”

U.S. Border Patrol agents study staging areas like the corrals south of Cochise County and make daily apprehensions. But there's a lot of desert between Chula Vista, Calif., and Brownsville, Texas. Agents estimate that three illegals get by for each one caught and sent back, and the newly deported simply hire different coyotes and try again. Skeptics estimate the ratio is

closer to one alien caught for every five who freely pass. Again, no one really knows. Statistics vary depending on who is doing the math and toward what end.

The reason America's southern border is so porous, many agree, is a lack of political will on the U.S. side to provide adequate security. Low pay, even after



Cochise County Sheriff Larry Dever says illegal immigration takes more than 30 percent of his budget. Desert deaths, he says, must all be investigated as homicides.

Sept. 11, 2001, drove thousands of Border Patrol agents to other jobs. And while their numbers have been urgently increased since a near-crisis exodus two years ago, authorities cannot stem the tide. Between 1992 and 2000, Border Patrol apprehensions of unauthorized migrants increased from 1.1 million to 1.6 million per year. Last February in southern Arizona, illegal border crossings accelerated again – some say by double or more – after President Bush's early 2004 proposal of a guest-worker program to temporarily legalize millions of undocumented workers, and in advance of a well-publicized June 1 crack-down. In the first three months of 2004, in the Tucson Border Patrol sector alone, more than 200,000 illegal aliens were apprehended, a 50-percent increase over the same period in 2003. The peak season, between the freezing nights of winter and blistering heat of summer, was yet to come.

“We’re under siege,” says Iris Lynch, who can see the Mexican border from her backyard. “They say we have more than a million a year coming through. There’s no port-a-potties out there. Think about that. Creeks where people used to hike are now littered and filled with human waste. They are everywhere. We button down every night. I don’t know how many hundreds go by at night, and I am not going out there to find out.”

The American Legion has several resolutions calling for immigration policy changes, better border security and, if necessary, military presence to support out-numbered U.S. authorities.

But troops on the border is a tough sell in the snow-bird retirement meccas of the deep

Southwest. “When I have talked to our congressman about it, the first comment is, ‘Well, you don’t want tanks driving down the streets of Green Valley,’” says Randy Graf, Republican House majority whip in the Arizona Legislature. “And I agree. I don’t think there’s anybody who would want tanks driving down the streets of Green Valley. But we are not talking about tanks. We don’t need tanks. We need a presence.”

Lacking that, local militia groups have sprung up. A growing corps of private land-owners and civilian watchdogs have taken up videocameras, binoculars, satellite phones and, indeed, arms, in an attempt to protect the borders themselves. They assemble in the desert at regularly scheduled intervals, as others might gather for bowling night, to scan the washes for tracks and listen in camouflage for the footfalls of an illegal population in transit.

It’s not a sport, says Chris Simcox of Tombstone, Ariz., who leads a grassroots organization called Civil Homeland Defense, which regularly stalks the border for aliens. “We have assisted the Border Patrol in catching 2,553 people in just over a year,” he says, adding that while some Border Patrol agents refer to his group as “birdwatchers,” critics call them “vigilantes.” Simcox says he and his fold are simply following orders President Bush issued after the terrorist attacks of 2001. “We took the president serious when he said to be vigilant and report suspicious illegal activities. They wanted all of America to get involved in national security. Nobody is doing more than we are, right here on the border, on the front line.”

And there’s no place like the front line to witness the collision between America’s broken immigration policy and its consequences on human lives. “People we have found out here have had no water, have been lost, were abandoned or abused by the smugglers, including children, and mothers carrying their babies,” Simcox says. “We have found hundreds of kids coming through in the middle of the night with no water. We have found entire families, entire villages from southern Mexico, trying to cross. I have personally caught people from 26 different countries, including China, Korea, Pakistan, and every Central American and South American country you can name. Hundreds from Poland, and some from Croatia. There is nothing that will boggle your mind more than to walk up to a group of people in the night, sitting on rocks in the desert, and they’re European or Asian.” Simcox says his group has saved 94 lives in the desert.

Illegal immigration is indeed a deadly risk. More than 2,000 undocumented immigrants died trying to cross into the United States between 1995 and 2002. Nearly 500 died – by causes including drowning, suffocation, homicide and heat exposure – in 2000 alone. “One of our biggest

challenges in law enforcement on the border is that each one of those deaths has to be investigated as a homicide," says Cochise County Sheriff Larry Dever, who says more than 30 percent of his budget is consumed each year on illegal immigration matters. "It's a huge commitment of manpower. We had 140 die in the desert last year in the four border counties. To be investigated as a homicide, that means I have to send out my resources to process the scene, figure out who they are, where they came from, how they got there, if there was any foul play, then take them to the medical examiner's office for an autopsy. Just this year, local mortuaries began refusing to pick up the bodies. They're not getting diddly squat for it. Plus, (the bodies) are just a mess – most of them have been out there three or four days when they are found. It's not pleasant. We also know there are hundreds, if not thousands, of unreported sexual assaults. One study suggested 68 percent of all migrants, by the time they reach the Arizona border, are victims of some kind of assault."

Simcox keeps a lawnchair tucked beneath a mesquite tree at his favorite rocky knoll. There, he has a sprawling view of the washes and gullies that drain toward the San Pedro River. Other members of his group stake out elevated positions so they can easily surround aliens passing below, blind them with spotlights and call in the Border Patrol for pickup. "That's all we do," Simcox says. "Once they are sitting down, I go up and say, 'Hola! Buenos dias!' I'm not shouting at them or anything. I'm not going to shoot someone. They're (mainly) just migrant workers. They don't deserve to die for that."

"From a national security viewpoint, this has got to be done. You've got to stop the drug dealers, the crime, the sex crimes, the slavery, the people dying in the desert. People shouldn't be dying for a minimum-wage job. This is really an ethnic cleansing. They are herding people over the border because they don't want to take care of them. Yes, there are jobs here. And yes, we need immigration. Immigration built this

country. However, every wave of immigration before has matched the need. Now, it's just a free-for-all. You have people coming here, making a mockery of our citizenship. That's what drives me to this."

Simcox watches quietly for any sign of movement. Suddenly, a tiny white plane soars overhead. He trains his binoculars on it. It's a drone – an unmanned aerial vehicle equipped with a camera that relays images back to a high-tech command center in the back of an American Border Patrol van five miles away. There, Glenn Spencer and his civilian crew record what they see in the desert and post their findings on the Web site Americanpatrol.com – an online forum for illegal immigration information, commentary and video recordings.

The ABP Web site regularly posts eerie images of aliens tromping single-file through the desert in the night. When the immigrants trip a buried sensor and see the little red light on the top of the camera, they turn and scurry back into the brush. "All you have to do is show up, and you will see people," says



An American Border Patrol drone records desert activity and relays it back to a mobile command center.

Michael King, who works as vice president of technology for Border Technologies, Inc., which operates out of the ABP headquarters. "We just go to the same spot. We don't even vary it."

Enough illegal traffic pours through the desert every day, Border Patrol agents could make as many apprehensions as desired, King says. "Tactically, they might be able to see every one of them, but logistically, they can't deal with it. It's just way too overwhelming. Thousands of people are coming into this country every night, just in this area here. And this is not a gigantic area."

Spencer says he believes demonstrations of his unmanned aerial vehicles contributed to funding and plans for two government drones set for deployment in the June crackdown in the remote country of southern Arizona.

Illegal immigration gravitated to the deserts and mountains by design after 1994 when Operation Gatekeeper tightened the border around populated areas of California and Texas. Civil libertarians called the effort by the Immigration and Naturalization Service a "brutal success" that turned border crossing into "the most obvious, most huge,

and systematic violation of human rights occurring on U.S. soil today." That was the observation of Wayne Cornelius, director of the Center for Comparative Immigration Studies at the University of California-San Diego, at a panel discussion in 2002. He said Gatekeeper failed to reduce the overall number of illegal aliens, tripled the INS budget, and increased deaths at the border. Some activists prefer opening the borders altogether over allowing half-hearted immigration policies to lead people to their deaths. "We must take death out of the migration equation," states the Rev. Robin

The American Legion's positions on illegal immigration

Threat to National Security. To reduce illegal immigration's threat to national security, The American Legion calls for collaboration among all law-enforcement agencies to work together to apprehend, detain and deport those in the United States illegally. "Our country's enemies recognize and understand that our nation's failure to control its borders or regulate the right to live in the United States is a weakness and have already, in the case of the acts of terrorism committed on Sept. 11, 2001, exploited that weakness with deadly consequences." – *Resolution 306, 2002*

Amnesty. No matter whether it is called a "legalization," "regularization" or a "guest-worker program," forgiveness of those who enter the United States illegally is a costly policy that leads to more, not less, illegal immigration. "Neither the administration or Congress have explained how a massive amnesty program for illegal immigrants will benefit the American public." – *Resolution 307, 2002*

College Financial Aid and In-State Tuition. The American Legion opposes any legislation proposed to provide financial aid and offer in-state tuition rates to illegal immigrants or grant amnesty to those younger than 21 who have lived in America and gone to school five years or more. – *Resolution 308, 2002*

21st-Century Immigration Policy. The American Legion supports a U.S. immigration policy that will limit immigration, eliminate some visa categories (such as those for adult offspring and siblings), restrict eligibility for public assistance, implement a nationwide system to determine employment eligibility, and provide funding necessary for effective border management and interior enforcement of immigration laws. – *Resolution 311, 2002*

Citizenship Naturalization Process. The Legion opposes any attempts to dilute such requirements as English language skills and knowledge of U.S. history and government in the naturalization process – "all vitally important in affecting a healthy assimilation into our society." – *Resolution 45, 2003*

Department of Homeland Security. The March 2003 incorporation of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service into the Department of Homeland Security leads the Legion to call for strict sanctions against employers who knowingly hire illegal aliens; adequate funds for U.S. authorities to provide border security; the denial of public assistance and unemployment compensation to illegal aliens; no extension or enhancement of legalization opportunities; and free flow of information and technology among agencies tasked with controlling the problem. – *Resolution 42, 2003*

Immigration Reform. The inability to control illegal immigration leads to the call for immediate reform, including more and better-trained Border Patrol agents, with hiring preference for veterans; increased collaboration with state and local authorities; immediate deportation proceedings for those without valid visas; requirement that legal aliens carry high-security identification verifiable through a central database; emergency measures to prevent human smuggling and to stop, detain and deport potential terrorists; and, "as appropriate, military resources ... to assist in stopping the flow of illegal aliens into this country." – *Resolution 40, 2003*

Student Visas. A foreign-student tracking system like the former INS Student and Exchange Visitor Information System should be adopted; institutions that do not comply should lose federal loans for foreign students. – *Resolution 39, 2003*

The Canadian Border. America's border with Canada lacks adequate security, and resources are needed. "There are only 1,773 U.S. Customs agents and 350 Border Patrol agents to guard the 4,000-mile United States and Canada border; and ... there are over 9,000 Border Patrol agents guarding the 2,000-mile border between the United States and Mexico." – *Resolution 38, 2003*

The Naturalization Process. The advent of foreign-language naturalization ceremonies, optional ceremonies, and naturalization by mail, leads the Legion to reiterate its stance that English be declared the nation's official language and that naturalization ceremonies at U.S. District Courts continue to serve as initial steps in the process. – *Resolution 44, 2003*

Matricula Consular Identification Cards. The Legion urges Congress and state legislatures to adopt measures to invalidate the cards. – *Resolution 46, 2003*

Non-Immigrant Visas. The Legion calls on Congress to establish numerical limits for all visa categories, and for all categories of temporary workers, to prevent labor-market distortions; and that federal authorities be provided the necessary tools to investigate fraud and other unlawful visa activities, deporting those who remain in the country after visas expire; and that "thorough background checks be conducted on all individuals entering the country." – *Resolution 47, 2003*

Legal Immigration. Rapid growth among immigrants, legal and illegal, "has placed great burdens on our nation's natural resources, housing, schools, medical facilities, government services and national security," according to The American Legion, as it calls for lower legal immigration limits. – *Resolution 48, 2003*

Hoover, founder and president of a group called Humane Borders, which distributes water in the desert for migrants trying to get into America, much to the chagrin of those who think such activities only encourage illegal immigration.

“The greatest betrayal in history is to open our borders like this to a hostile nation, and there is no question this is a hostile nation – hostile and growing more violent,” Spencer argues. “A woman was accosted just a few miles away from here last week. Then a young man whose car overheated was jumped by three Mexicans, who started choking him to death. We’ve had people accosted, fired at, and the Border Patrol has been in several shootouts, just recently. It’s getting violent. Assimilation is in reverse thrust.”

Spencer has raised money and spent tens of thousands of his own dollars on monitoring equipment, including a digital computer lab in his home near Sierra Vista, Ariz. His group also helped lead a 115,000-petition rally last spring in Tucson to put the military on the border. Open-borders activists, many wearing masks, came to the rally carrying placards with caustic slogans contending that the American Southwest was originally Aztec territory and should be ceded to Mexico.

At a layup area in rural Cochise County, Henry Harvey – a member of Civil Homeland Defense – sorts through the debris imported from Mexico. He finds backpacks filled with cookies and broken tortillas. A woman’s denim jacket. He picks it up and shakes the dirt from it. He will donate it to a shelter in Sierra Vista. He kicks over empty water bottles and pop cans, shakes toothbrushes and razors from plastic bags. “These are not poor, starving people,” he grumbles, studying tracks in the

Henry Harvey of Civil Homeland Defense picks through items left at a lay-up area east of Sierra Vista, Ariz. Clothing items in good shape, he says, will be donated to a women’s shelter.

road where a car pulled up the night before, and people climbed into unfamiliar cars for a back-seat ride into the idea of America, an idea they are changing.

When Jesus Aguilar came across in the early 1970s, he was a 15-year-old boy from Guanajuato. To him, he was coming from nowhere. The son of a migrant worker who participated in the Bracero Program, which recruited migrant labor into the American Southwest to make up for lost manpower during World War II (the program continued until 1964), Aguilar had no confidence of receiving fair pay for a day’s work in Mexico. He remembers how his father’s

irregular jobs in America sustained their family and how life on the other side was often spent hungry. “Workers are kept down,” he says. “They’re never going to get nothing. That’s why we are here. America has enough to feed all of Mexico.”

About 25 years ago, Aguilar and 16 others followed a coyote into the night. His hands became so numb he could not stuff them into his pockets. The group went for 12 hours straight, buoyed by the promise of America, the likelihood of something better ahead. “My dream was to buy my own washer, my own car, maybe own a watch,” he says. “You could work here and have



100 percent more than you could have there. In America, you can eat meat every day. Poor in America is much better than rich in Mexico.”

He lived in fear. “Every day, you worry about getting caught,” he says. “You drive with no driver’s license, and they come up from behind, and you think they will get you.” In less than a year, authorities found Aguilar working in an orange grove and deported him to Nogales, where he paid another coyote another \$90 to get him back into the United States. He was not caught again and became a U.S. citizen two years ago. He and his wife have four daughters who will never have to hire smugglers, jump fences or sleep in tool sheds to avoid detection. His 12-year-old daughter Mayomy, whose bilingual skills are sometimes summoned to provide translation at her school, wants to be a teacher when she grows up. She honors her father whose hands, once numb with cold in the desert, are now scarred and leathery from a quarter-century of seven-day work weeks on construction sites in the harsh Arizona elements.

Aguilar says most Mexican immigrants are like him, here to work hard and make money to feed their families. “Go out to the freeway, and you will never see a Mexican out there holding up a sign,” he says. “You see the Mexicans down at the Home Depot saying they want to work. If you like to eat, you like to work. I like to work. I never went to school in Mexico. I went to school here and learned some, but I didn’t stay. So it was pick and shovel for me.”

He finds himself ironically concerned about his family’s security amid the changing complexion of illegal immigration in his part of the city. “When I go down to the (grocery store), at times I don’t feel good. And I am Mexican. They’ll steal whatever they want. Before, you



Jesus Aguilar came to America illegally in the 1970s. He is now a citizen with four daughters “in the top 10 percent of their class.” Mayomy, 12, occasionally serves as a school translator.

never saw all the South Americans. Now, you see them from all different countries. We have a lot of problems now. So many people here are banditos who don’t care if they go to jail. The government has to find out who are the good ones and get rid of the bad ones.” That’s easier said than done, he admits, because once deported, “they are just going to try again. I came the same way.”

“I can’t blame them,” says Jeff Johnson, a Phoenix contractor who doubts that any guest worker participating in a U.S.

program would voluntarily return to the home country after a three-year work visit, as suggested in the guest-worker proposal. “Why would I want to go back to a country where there’s nothing left for me?”

Graf says illegal immigration easily costs the taxpayers of Arizona \$1 billion a year. “A lot of them came up to work in those plants (built near the border after the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement),” Graf says. “That was the magnet. Now those jobs are leaving and going to China or Indonesia. Where do the workers go? Do they go back

home and look for a job? Or do they step across the border? The social structure in Mexico is being destroyed by this. You have communities in Mexico where the men are all gone. They have come up here to work, to supposedly send money home. They come up here and start a second family. There are many, many stories about mothers with three or four children, with no income whatsoever, in communities with no men living in them, or very few men. And it’s certainly not helping our social structure here either.”

“The law-abiding businessman cannot compete,” says Republican Rep. Russell Pearce, chairman of the House Appropriations Committee in the Arizona Legislature. “I know a construction contractor who once had 100 employees and now only has five. He refuses to hire people illegally. He pays his taxes. Who is standing up for him while he is being destroyed by those who break the law?”

“There is not a week that goes by that I don’t talk to someone in my district who is leaving because they can’t take it anymore. The neighborhoods have changed. They have become violent. This isn’t about race. This is about a culture that is destroying America, and we had better quit pandering to it.”

The total K-12 expenditure for illegal immigrants costs the states \$7.4 billion a year, enough to buy a computer for every junior high school student nationwide.

— Federation for American Immigration Reform

“What you get is the third-world country they ran away from – nothing but poverty,” says Rusty Childress, owner and president of a Buick dealership in a once-affluent part of Phoenix where poor immigrants, many undocumented, have dramatically shifted the demographics. “In the last 10 years, it has gone from 13 percent Hispanic to 43 percent. That’s within a three-mile range of the dealership.”

He looks across his lot of luxury sedans and leather-seated SUVs, toward the vacant car lot next door. It used to be a Volvo dealership. “Drug busts and drop houses and homicides ...” Childress groans. “Employees are scared to work for us. Customers are scared to do business with us. It just keeps getting worse. The Democrats say there is no problem. The Republicans say there is a problem, but we can’t do anything about it.”

“There comes a point where you’ve had all you can take,” Pearce says. “The people we elect into positions of public trust fail to do their jobs. It’s not just a federal issue. Once they cross that border, it’s our neighborhoods, our health-care system, our criminal justice system, our educational system. It’s us who pay the price. This is the Trojan horse of America.”

Pearce says Phoenix is now in the midst of a 60-percent rise in homicides directly related to human trafficking. One particular incident just last November involved a bloody, running gun battle on Interstate 10 that turned out to be a turf war between two competing coyotes. “Several people were shot and killed. Cars were shot up, all about illegal alien smugglers and illegal aliens. Every day, there is a new incident.”

“How do you tie this all up into one nice, neat little package when you have federal legislators and the White House saying they are going to implement another new guest-worker program?” Graf asks. “They have to look at this more broadly, including all the various visas we have – 70-some

different programs. And 40 percent of the people in this country illegally came legally and then just overstayed their visas. If we have no method of controlling legal immigration – and we really don’t – there certainly isn’t a will or a want in the federal government to try to stop illegal immigration. It’s very frustrating.”

“Who is the missing person at the party?” Johnson asks. “The federal government. They’re not living up to their responsibilities. As the world gets smaller, the problem becomes more glaring. If we had another 9-11 in this country, it would wake people up. Terrorism is waiting to happen, and no one is stepping up.”

“America ought to be mad,” says Pearce. “In Arizona, our health-care welfare budget – our Medicaid – grew from 2001 when it was just over \$200 million to

\$1.2 billion in 2003. It’s on the way to bankrupting the state. This is an invasion, not a trickle. And we are sending mixed messages. We tell them it’s illegal to come, but if you do come here, we’ll do nothing about it, and there’s probably a reward for you at the end of the trek. If I was in Mexico and kept getting these messages, I would fill my backpack and head north, too.

“So who is responsible? America has to share some of that blame. Some, not all of it, because you have a corrupt government in Mexico, which should be fixing its own problems. There should be an incentive to stay in their own country. There isn’t. And because the economy here has a bloated welfare system, and the fact that we don’t enforce the immigration laws here, people know if they get past the border,

they can feel pretty confident about themselves. When do we stand up for Americans? When do we stand up for the law-abiding citizen? What is government’s No. 1 job? Public safety. Protect our liberties, our homes, our properties, our families. They are not doing that. They are failing

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miserably. We ought to hold our politicians accountable. Poll after poll shows the American public supports securing the border and putting a stop to illegal immigration. There’s a lot that can be done. We’re just not doing it.”

In the meantime, as illegal immigration metastasizes into more and more states – from the poultry plants of Tennessee to the textile mills of North Carolina and department stores, motels and restaurants all across middle America – the consequences of complacency go largely unweighed.

We simply watch in bewilderment as the swollen bodies of 19 dead or dying Central Americans are removed from an abandoned, unventilated trailer, left at a roadstop on a 91-degree south-Texas day. We watch from our living-room windows as the coyotes gather again on the desert. And we cannot help but wonder about all the U.S. troops deployed to watch the borders of 100 or more countries around the world, including those of nations that hate nothing more than the idea of America, while thousands of aliens penetrate our own lines every day, confident that eventually their illegal trespasses will be forgiven. 🌿

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