



# Border Visions and Immigration

*"We picture a border where virtually all migration is legal, not because the United States and Mexico cede their authority to regulate admissions, but because immigration laws align with the labor, family, development and protection needs of residents, visitors, and passers-through."*

—From *The New Ellis Island*

Migration theologian Fr. Daniel Groody suggests that the U.S.-Mexico border is more than an imaginary dividing line between two countries. Rather, a complex history and conflicting prerogatives have resulted in a border between "national security and human insecurity, sovereign rights and human rights, civil law and natural law, and citizenship and discipleship."<sup>1</sup>

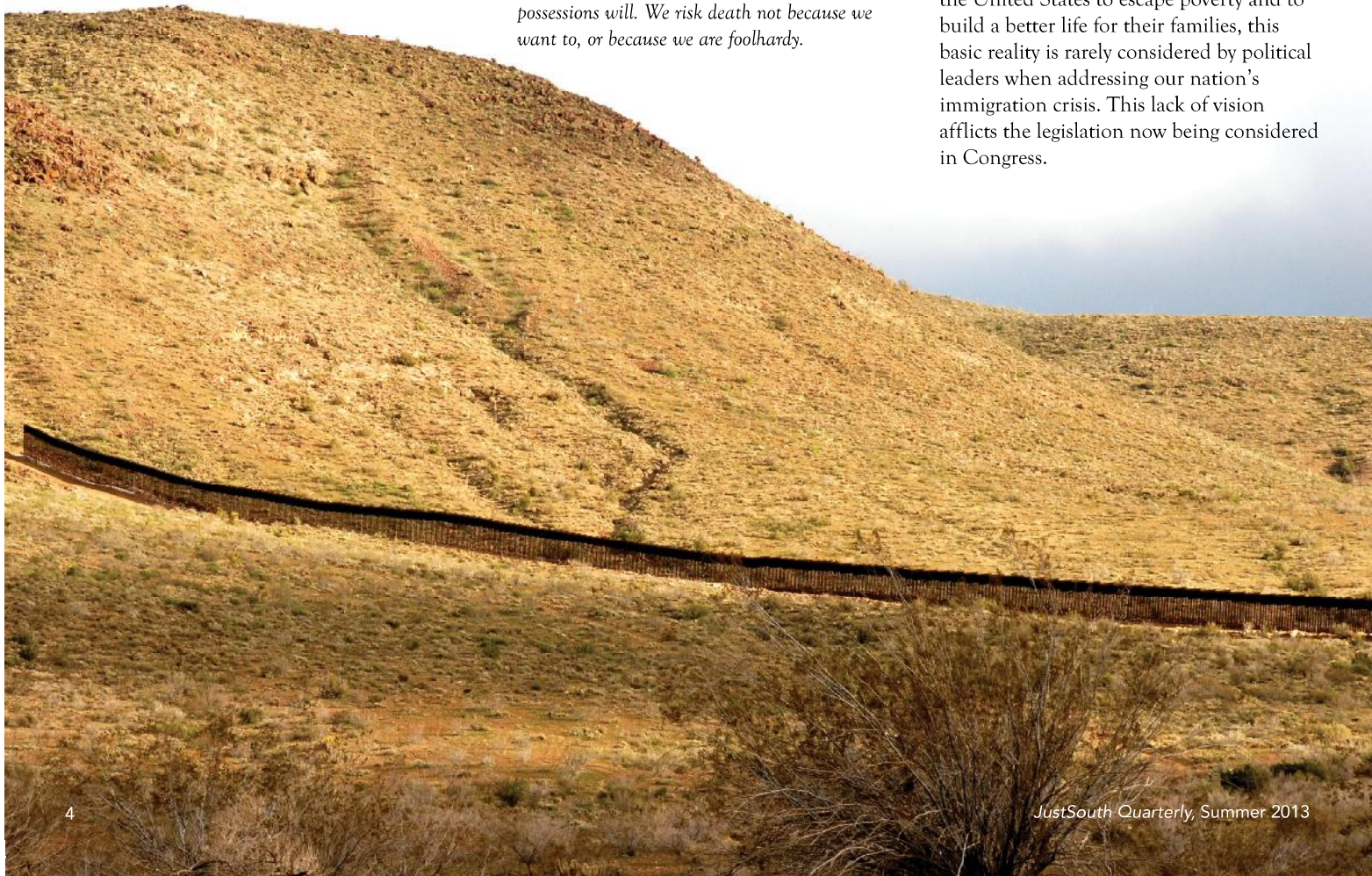
The eloquent testimony of a border-crosser identified as Ignacio, interviewed by Miguel De La Torre in 2008, illustrates how the interplay of natural law, human insecurity, and the struggle for basic human rights compel migrants to risk their lives for an uncertain future in the United States:

*It is crazy to cross the desert by foot. It is suicidal. If the extreme heat and lack of food and water don't kill you, accidents, snake bites, or crooked coyotes set on robbing you of your life's possessions will. We risk death not because we want to, or because we are foolhardy.*

*We risk death for the families left behind. Would you not cross a hundred deserts to feed your child? It may be crazy to cross, but we are not crazy, we are desperate. Even though I am a believer and put my trust in God, I'm still desperate...I simply could not provide the basic necessities for my children. I had to cross for their sake...*

*At the safe house...They told us how we would be treated...as if we were either invisible or dogs. At first I didn't believe them, but after being here for three years, they were right... I live in fear, fear of being caught, fear of being returned, and of course, fear of having to cross the desert again. That is the hardest thing about this...not being able to hug my children, knowing they will grow up not knowing who I am. It's enough to drive you mad.<sup>2</sup>*

Although it is widely recognized that migrants cross without authorization into the United States to escape poverty and to build a better life for their families, this basic reality is rarely considered by political leaders when addressing our nation's immigration crisis. This lack of vision afflicts the legislation now being considered in Congress.



# Reform

BY SUE WEISHAR, PH.D.

Instead of addressing the root causes of migration, the comprehensive immigration reform bill that was voted out of the U.S. Senate on June 27, the *Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act of 2013* (S. 744), devotes an astronomical amount of resources, \$46 billion, to further fortifying our country's border with Mexico. Of this amount, \$4.6 billion is dedicated to implementing a Comprehensive Southern Border Security Strategy, \$8 billion for a Southern Border Fencing Strategy, and \$30 billion to hire and deploy an additional 19,200 U.S. Border Patrol agents—resulting in an almost doubling of the current number of agents to 38,405.

The goal of the Comprehensive Southern Border Security Strategy is to achieve and maintain “effective control” of high-risk sectors of the border.<sup>3</sup> Effective control of high risk sectors is defined as a) persistent surveillance and b) an “effectiveness rate” of 90 percent (measured by adding apprehensions and turnbacks in a sector divided by total number of known illegal entries). The \$4.6 billion allocated to meet border security goals will be spent on additional mobile, video, and agent portable surveillance systems, Department of Defense border radar equipment, and the deployment of 160 unmanned aircraft systems, including crew and personnel.<sup>4</sup>

The \$8 billion S. 744 allocates to achieve its border fencing goals will be used to double the length of fencing along the southern border from 350 miles to at least 700 miles.

The bill also allocates additional funding to criminally prosecute and incarcerate people crossing the border and increase coordination with state and local law enforcement agencies along the Southwest border. Additionally S. 744 authorizes the deployment of the National Guard to the southern border to construct fencing and checkpoints and to increase ground-based mobile surveillance systems, among other tasks.

This massive increase in border security funding is being considered despite the following facts:

- The U.S. government currently spends more funding on border enforcement than on all other major criminal law enforcement agencies combined.<sup>5</sup>
- Prior high-tech initiatives to secure the border, such as the Secure Border Initiative (SBI), have proven costly and ineffective.<sup>6</sup>
- The border has never been more secure, with apprehensions hovering at a 40-year low.<sup>7</sup>
- Just under half of undocumented immigrants in the U.S. never even walked across a border, they arrived by plane and over-stayed their visas.<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, net migration from Mexico—the largest sending country for undocumented migration—is at net zero for several reasons, including those that have little to do with U.S. border policies. Would-be migrants have been discouraged by the lack of jobs in the U.S. since the onset of the Great Recession and the dangers posed by drug cartels that have taken hold in northern Mexico. A drop in the Mexican birth rate from 6.8 children per woman in 1970 to about two children per woman today has led to a decreased migrant pool. Increased economic and educational opportunities have created a more hopeful future for Mexico's citizens—since 2000 per capita gross domestic product and family income in Mexico has jumped nearly 45 percent.<sup>9</sup>

Nevertheless, the obsession with border security in S.744 is so pervasive that the path to citizenship the bill holds out for millions of undocumented immigrants living in the U.S. is tied to two “triggers” having to do with border enforcement and fencing. Applications for Registered Provisional Immigrant status (RPI) cannot begin until the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has submitted and certified to Congress the strategies for border enforcement and fencing. DHS has six months to submit such plans after the bill becomes law. RPI individuals cannot be granted legal permanent resident status until

ten years after enactment and DHS certifies that the border security plan is substantially operational and the fencing plan is substantially complete.<sup>10</sup> Also, a mandatory employment verification system for all U.S. employees must also be implemented, an electronic exit system at air and sea ports must be operational, and no fewer than 38,405 border patrol agents must be deployed along the southern border.

Despite its many shortcomings, the hope is that provisions in S. 744 having to do with future immigrant visas will finally begin to align our nation's clear need for immigrant labor with a legal immigration system to accommodate that need. The bill also addresses concerns about abusive practices of border patrol agents long raised by border residents<sup>11</sup> by requiring DHS border personnel be trained on the human and civil rights of migrants. Most importantly, it provides a way for millions of undocumented immigrants in the U.S. to come out of the shadows to earn legalization and eventually citizenship. For this reason alone people of faith must do everything we can this summer and fall to work for passage of comprehensive immigration reform on which rests the hopes and dreams of millions of immigrants.

And then let us work to realize a new narrative of the border. Faith leaders and border scholars describe in a new report what a re-visioned border could look like:

*We picture a border where virtually all migration is legal, not because the United States and Mexico cede their authority to regulate admissions, but because immigration laws align with the labor, family, development and protection needs of residents, visitors, and passer-through. We see a region in which laws safeguard God-given rights and promote the common good. We envision a region in which constitutional rights and protections fully apply to its residents...We see a region where globalization has been infused with an ethic of solidarity and a commitment to the well-being of its residents...We envision a gathering place for God's scattered children, where residents and visitors in all their diversity can work together to build the human family. We hope, pray, and vow to work for such a border.<sup>12</sup>*

—Endnotes on back cover

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### ENDNOTES

- 1 Daniel G. Groody, "Testimony on Being a Good Samaritan," in Miguel A. de la Torre, ed., *Trails of Hope and Terror: Testimonies on Immigration* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2010), p. 27.
- 2 "Testimony from a Border Crosser: 'Ignacio,'" in Miguel A. de la Torre, ed., *Trails of Hope and Terror: Testimonies on Immigration* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2010), pp. 18 & 19.
- 3 The Senate bill considers high-risk border sectors as those "where apprehensions are above 30,000 individuals per year."
- 4 Of the nine Border Patrol sectors along the 1,954 mile U.S./Mexico border, three are considered high-risk based on fiscal year 2012 data: Tucson (120,000 apprehensions); Rio Grande Valley (97,762), and Laredo (44,872). In 2011 Tucson had an effectiveness rate of 86.9 percent, Rio Grande Valley had an effectiveness rate of 70.8 percent, and Laredo had an effectiveness rate of 84 percent. Illegal entry data will include only the immigrants detected by Border Patrol, and not those who cross without notice. See Ian Gordon, "The Immigration Bill's Security Poison Pill," *Mother Jones*, April 17, 2013, at [www.motherjones.com/immigration-reform-bill-senate-gang-eight-border-security](http://www.motherjones.com/immigration-reform-bill-senate-gang-eight-border-security).
- 5 Doris Meissner, Donald M. Kerwin, Muzaffar Chishti, and Claire Bergeron, "Immigration Enforcement in the United States: The Rise of a Formidable Machinery," Migration Policy Institute, January, 2013, available at [www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/enforcementpillars.pdf](http://www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/enforcementpillars.pdf).
- 6 Tom Barry, "Fallacies of High-Tech Fixes for Border Security," Center for International Policy, April, 2010, available at [www.ciponline.org/images/uploads/1004\\_TBP.pdf](http://www.ciponline.org/images/uploads/1004_TBP.pdf).
- 7 Lourdes Medrano, "Behind decline in US-Mexico border crossings: Higher risks, lower rewards," *The Christian Science Monitor*, December 14, 2011, available at [www.csmonitor.com/USA/2011/1214/Behind-decline-in-US-Mexico-border-crossings-higher-risks-lower-rewards](http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/2011/1214/Behind-decline-in-US-Mexico-border-crossings-higher-risks-lower-rewards).
- 8 *Fact Sheet: Modes of Entry for the Unauthorized*, Pew Research Hispanic Center, May 22, 2006, available at [www.csmonitor.com/USA/2011/1214/Behind-decline-in-US-Mexico-border-crossings-higher-risks-lower-rewards](http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/2011/1214/Behind-decline-in-US-Mexico-border-crossings-higher-risks-lower-rewards).
- 9 Damien Cave, "For Mexicans looking north, a new calculus favors home," *The New York Times*, July 5, 2011, available at [www.nytimes.com/interactive/2011/07/06/world/americas/immigration.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2011/07/06/world/americas/immigration.html?_r=0).
- 10 Exceptions here are for children who entered the U.S. as children (DREAMers) and people granted agriculture-card status.
- 11 See Michael S. Danielson, *Documented Failures: The Consequences of Immigration Policy on the U.S.-Mexico Border*, a publication of Jesuit Refugee Services, Jesuit Conference of the United States, and Kino Border Initiative, February 13, 2003, available at [www.jesuit.org/jesuits/wp-content/uploads/Kino\\_FULL-REPORT\\_web.pdf](http://www.jesuit.org/jesuits/wp-content/uploads/Kino_FULL-REPORT_web.pdf).
- 12 Donald Kerwin, Joanne Welter, Michael Seifert, Rev. John Fife, Hector Rodriguez, Luzdy Stuckey, Mike Wilson, Rabbi Larry Bach, Annie Wilson, West Cosgrove, "Rethinking the U.S.-Mexico Border Region from a Faith Perspective," in *The New Ellis Island: Visions from the Border for the Future of America*, Border Network for Human Rights, May, 2013, pp. 22 & 23, available at [www.scribd.com/doc/140208614/The-New-Ellis-Island-Visions-from-the-border-for-the-future-of-America](http://www.scribd.com/doc/140208614/The-New-Ellis-Island-Visions-from-the-border-for-the-future-of-America).

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