



BORDERLAND | *The Line Within*
STUDY AND DISCUSSION GUIDE

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Synopsis of the film

Immigrants are under attack every day in this country, and not just along the southern border - we have become a Borderland, the border is everywhere and within every immigrant. A massive surveillance, militarized and carceral apparatus has been built to capture, imprison, and deport millions of immigrants. Trump vows to round up and force mass deportation of immigrants regardless of documentation status. In *BORDERLAND | The Line Within* a trio of digital humanists, immigrants themselves, dig deep into the hidden apparatus of the border industrial complex, exposing ruthless profiteering from the suffering of fellow humans. In juxtaposition, the stories of immigrant heroines and heroes forge a way forward, intent on building a movement claiming their human rights in the shadow of this behemoth. The protagonists' engagement with each other via text, Zoom, voice, and in-person crafts our storylines into one coherent whole, envisioning a future for immigrants rooted in human connection and the sanctity of life.



L to R: Saba, Giovanni Batz, **Kaxh Mura'l**, Francisco Chávez. (Photo: Juan Hernández, AEC)

In alignment with Skylight's dedication to transitional justice, *BORDERLAND | The Line Within* chronicles the journey from Guatemala of Kaxh Mura'l. His life's trajectory is one of defending the land of his Maya community in the highlands of Guatemala from the encroachment of a mining company, which led to credible death threats against him. Kaxh worked closely with Skylight in making our previous film, *500 YEARS*, so he called Director Pamela Yates when he fled Guatemala to seek asylum. In making *BORDERLAND* they worked together to document his long and arduous asylum journey, using his mobile phone for powerful clandestine videos and his soulful messages. Kaxh is now living in southern Florida, still awaiting his asylum hearing, and working with others as an interpreter for other Maya migrants like himself who are seeking asylum.



Gabriela Castañeda

Gabriela Castañeda's story in *BORDERLAND* is one of political growth as an organizer, first in her community of undocumented immigrants along the southwestern U.S. border working with the Border Network for Human Rights, and then taking her organizing and lived experience to a national level. A talented organizer, Gabriela shows a path forward for immigrant families.



xpMethod Digital Humanists L to R: Dr. Roopika Risam, **Dr. Alex Gil**, Dr. Manan Ahmed

Alex Gil is driven by outrage at the abuses, family separations, and insidious entrenched presence of the border industrial complex through ubiquitous surveillance and a vast system of detention and deportation. He pulled together a team of fellow PhD Digital Humanists—professors who use digital technologies and apply it to traditional humanities research—, who were immigrants all like himself working in academia. Calling themselves the xpMethod, together they scraped the web and visualized the data to produce an exposé of the brutal multi-billion dollar apparatus of the border industrial complex, which they posted online. It is a distinct example of the active role that academics can play as protagonists and not simply commentators on social movements.



Giovanni Batz (center) talks with Kaxh Mura'l (L) and Francisco Chávez (R)

Giovanni Batz was born and raised in Los Angeles, California and is currently an Assistant Professor of Chicana/o Studies at the University of California Santa Barbara. He first met Kaxh while conducting research in the Ixil region on resistance movements against extractivist industries, which is the basis of several publications, including his book the [*Fourth Invasion: Decolonizing Histories, Extractivism, and Maya Resistance in Guatemala*](#) (UC Press 2024). He played a key role in *BORDERLAND*, both on camera and in developing the narrative.

BORDERLAND weaves these narratives together with compelling visuals, showcasing the burgeoning movement for immigrant rights and envisioning a future rooted in human rights and justice.

Pamela Yates | Director Statement



Pamela Yates self portrait

BORDERLAND | The Line Within is a critique of my country's inhumane treatment of people arriving in the U.S. It's about the use of immigration as a gateway to fascist ideology and political power. I've been making films internationally for the past 40 years, but feel it is important to have a critique of my own country now. I searched among Americans finding creative ways to resist the cruelty of our immigration policies. Still, I found a dynamic movement growing among undocumented immigrants to organize, educate themselves, demand their constitutional rights, and become a force. Weaving the story together by scraping the web and invoking the Freedom of Information Act, I chose a trio of experimental digital humanists artfully exposing the business of immigration, a multibillion-dollar system to stop people from crossing the border, incarcerate them, and deport them. Making this film would take five years.

Never has my work as a human rights defender and documentary filmmaker come together so closely or been so demanding. Never had I had to depend so strongly on the collaboration of the protagonists in telling their stories. For example, when Kaxh Mura'l, an **environmental defender** of the Maya-Ixil ancestral lands was threatened with death for his activism, he fled his homeland, Guatemala, and began the dangerous journey to seek asylum in the U.S. Since he was in my previous film, *500 YEARS*, he contacted me upon leaving Guatemala, so I maintained communication with him to ensure that he was safe. He's a beautiful writer and an important leader. Together, we would tell his story.



Kaxh Mura'l (L) and immigration lawyer **Carlos Spector (R)** discuss Kaxh's asylum case

When Kaxh arrived in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, I was able to put him in contact with a pro bono lawyer across the U.S. border in El Paso, who could travel back and forth and represent him. I acted as a kind of paralegal to the lawyer Carlos Spector, researching, gathering documentation, creating briefs to argue the case in court, and writing an affidavit for Kaxh and his traveling companion Francisco. Together, we formed a circle of solidarity composed of Carlos, Giovanni Batz, church supporters, academics, and humanitarian aid people working in the El Paso/Juárez corridor. We'd meet weekly to move Kaxh and Francisco's cases forward and provide for their needs. I knew I had to be completely transparent about my involvement in how I, as the filmmaker, helped shape the story. I did it through sparse narration and Kaxh's harrowing WhatsApp voice messaging back and forth with me. We laid bare the filmmaking process, another exciting facet of the film itself.

BORDERLAND would be connected to The Resistance Saga, the trilogy of films about Guatemala that I had made over the past 35 years, but it would take place in the U.S. As Maya immigration increased – there are now more than 1 million Maya people in the diaspora here – I thought of *BORDERLAND* as a continuation of the story and our work.

I was so fortunate to meet Gabriela Castañeda of The Border Network for Human Rights, and for her to collaborate with me over the years it took to make this film. Gaby, the talented organizer she has become, showed me what extraordinary perseverance it takes to build leadership within immigrant communities when people are so afraid. She brought us into places where immigrants felt free to talk to her and each other about this fear and how it affected their children. Though in danger of being deported for her activism, Gaby's sharp intelligence always put others first. She knew how to bring out the greatest leadership potential in each person she encountered.



Juan Hernández and Pamela Yates filming in the Sonoran desert (Photo: Skylight)

Together with Juan Hernández, the cinematographer who lives in northern Mexico and who is best known for his dramatic feature films, we devised a look that made the most of the anamorphic widescreen format 2.39:1 (for a more epic feel) as we wove complicated stories together using only prime lenses. I wanted to capture the majesty and terror of the landscapes, the border wall scar, and the excitement of creating power in numbers as immigrants formed nationwide networks. I thought about how to visualize an almost subversive environment for the xpMethod digital humanists, a liminal space to expose the cruelty of what our tax dollars are supporting, often without our knowledge. *BORDERLAND* was filmed to be seen on the big screen. It's my commitment to the future of cinema.

The recorded location sound had to be perfect, which is always difficult in documentary filmmaking, where you have no control over the surroundings. I began my career as a sound recordist, so you can only imagine how demanding I am of sound recordists on my own films. David Fournier Castillo is the prodigy sound recordist from Mexico City who made all the difference in his close attention to recording the soundscape. He delivered magnificent sounds from the Arizona desert to studio shoots in New York City.

I had always wanted Sara Curruchich to compose and perform the musical soundtrack on *BORDERLAND*. I knew she would bring Mayan sensibilities, instrumentation, and vocalization to evoke the tragedy of being forced to flee and the nostalgia for family, land, language, and culture left behind. Our long-time composer, Roger C. Miller, joined Sara and they created the extraordinary film music track together.

The meaning of the title *BORDERLAND | The Line Within* is at the heart of the film. The border is not a geographical line but rather a vast border industrial complex entrenched in every corner of the U.S. It is inside each and every undocumented person because wherever they may be, the fear of being discovered and deported terrifies them. Yet, in the shadow of the border industrial complex, they are quietly creating networks and building strength.



Sara Curruchich, composer, singer and songwriter of *BORDERLAND*
(Photo: courtesy Sara Curruchich)

About the filmmaker

Pamela Yates is the Co-founder and Creative Director of Skylight, a non-profit organization dedicated to creating feature-length documentary films and digital media tools that advance awareness of human rights and the quest for justice by implementing multi-year outreach campaigns designed to engage, educate, and activate social change. She is the Director of the Sundance Special Jury Award-winning *When the Mountains Tremble*; the Executive Producer of the Academy Award-winning *Witness to War*; and the Director of *State of Fear: The Truth About Terrorism*, which has been translated into 47 languages and broadcast in 154 countries. Her film *Granito: How to Nail a Dictator*, for which she was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship, was used as key forensic evidence in the genocide trial against Efraín Ríos Montt in Guatemala. Her third film in the Guatemalan trilogy, *500 YEARS*, had its world premiere at the 2017 Sundance Film Festival and is currently in wide release. Yates is a member of the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, the Sundance Institute, the Writers Guild of America, and the International Documentary Association.

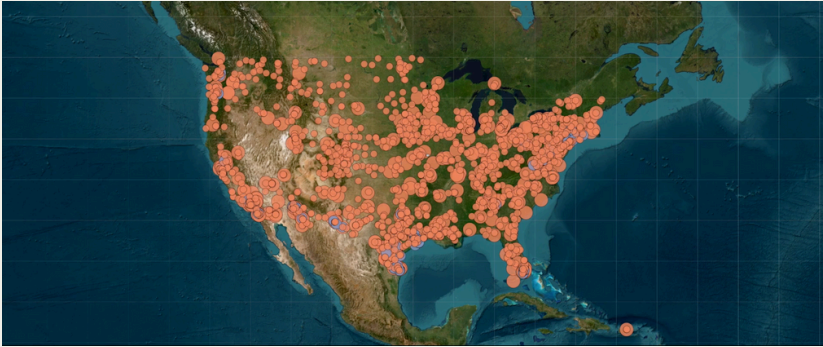
About Skylight



Skylight Leadership team members Vanessa Cuervo, Estefanía Villa, Vaclav Masek, Heny Cuesta, Ignacio Decerega, Luisa Herve, Matisse Bustos, Paco de Onís and Pamela Yates, and Gustavo Hincapié and Friends, (Photo: Skylight)

BORDERLAND is part of Skylight's mission and history of using documentary filmmaking to strengthen social justice movements and advance human rights by catalyzing collaborative networks of artists and activists. The film intends to engage audiences and partners in meaningful dialogue and action toward immigration reform and the defense of democracy. We envision a world in which hope and solidarity unite us and stories of justice and freedom define us. Skylight is a non-profit human rights media organization, established in 1981. Learn more about [Skylight](#).

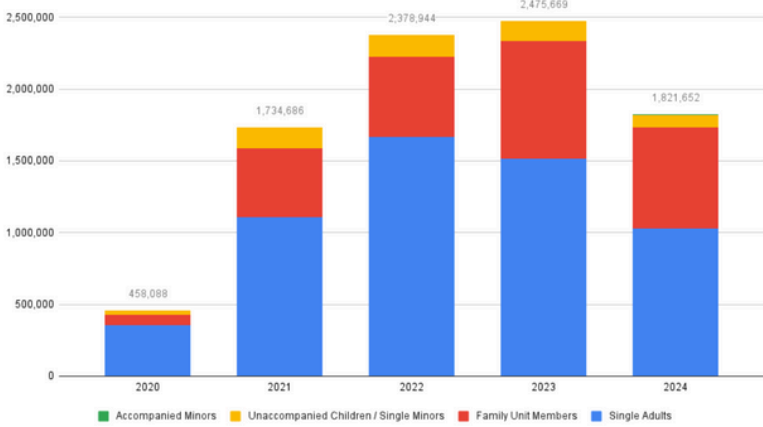
Part I - The Border is Everywhere



Migration to the United States is a complex and multifaceted issue that has shaped the nation's history and continues to be a topic of intense debate. But not everyone has the same opportunity¹ to move across borders. Factors such as economic resources, education, kinship networks, colonial legacies, and geopolitical circumstances significantly influence who can migrate to the United States. The U.S.-Mexico border wall and immigration enforcement practices play a crucial role in shaping migration experiences. The border wall,² a controversial structure spanning portions of the 1,954-mile boundary, serves as both a physical and symbolic barrier to entry. Additionally, it's important to note that **U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)** operates within a 100-mile radius of any external boundary of the United States, encompassing a significant portion of the population. This extended jurisdiction has implications for both documented and undocumented **immigrants** living within these areas.

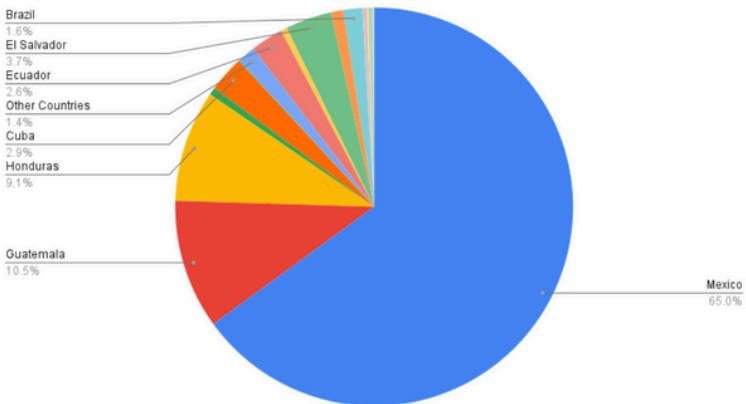
Over the past decade, migration flows to the United States have undergone significant changes,³ marked by a shift in the types and demographics of encounters at the U.S.-Mexico border. Historically largely represented by Mexican nationals, recent years have seen a substantial rise in migrants from Central American countries, particularly Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador [See *Table 2*]. This shift reflects the structural inequalities, economic precarity, and political violence that continue to impact these regions. Additionally, there has been a shift in the age demographics, with a growing number of unaccompanied minors and family units seeking **asylum**, as opposed to the predominantly single adult males of the past [See *Table 1*]. Between 2020 and 2024, the increase in these vulnerable populations—over 8 million encounters in the Southern border⁴—has highlighted the need for comprehensive immigration policy reform that addresses the root causes of migration and ensures humane treatment for all migrants.

Table 1. Yearly Migration at the U.S.-Mexico Border (2020-2024), by Demographic Category



Source: U.S. Customs and Border Protection's "[Nationwide Encounters](#)." Accessed July 16, 2024.

Table 2. Yearly Migration at the U.S.-Mexico Border (2020-2024), by "Nationality"



Source: U.S. Customs and Border Protection's "[Nationwide Encounters](#)." Accessed July 16, 2024.

Throughout *BORDERLAND | The Line Within*, is the notion of *the border is everywhere*. The title of the film derives from how the State apparatus captures, detains, deports and its surveillance is everywhere. In social science research, borders are constructed and maintained in various ways to understand social phenomena and human interactions⁵ to highlight the idea that borders are not just physical or geographical lines that separate territories. This concept suggests that borders exist beyond the traditional understanding of national boundaries and can manifest in social, cultural, political, and symbolic contexts. In essence, the statement implies that boundaries and divisions are pervasive and extend into different spheres of life,⁶ influencing relationships, identities, power dynamics, and interactions between individuals and groups. The more cultural (human) part is reflected here, in terms of normalizing and internalizing the border.



Young man looks through the border wall from Mexico into U.S. side of the border
(Photo: Juan Hernández, AEC)

Reflect on the “out of place” feeling that the protagonists in *BORDERLAND* experience when dealing with immigration enforcement and confronting the ever presence of the border wall. These can be attributed to several factors. Many migrants, including those with legal status, experience significant fear and anxiety related to immigration enforcement. In a 2020 survey conducted by the [Migration Policy Institute](#) (MPI),⁷ 59% of Latino students reported fearing someone close to them would be deported, and 56% knew someone who had been deported. This fear leads to heightened anxiety levels, with 75% of these students showing clinically significant anxiety symptoms. As made evident by the stories of the film’s protagonists Gabriela Castañeda and Kaxh M’ural, immigration enforcement has resulted in substantial social isolation among Latino communities. The same MPI survey found that 38% of respondents in a study reported being afraid to leave their homes due to police involvement in immigration matters, while 42% felt more isolated because of it.

The fear of immigration enforcement causes many migrants to avoid engaging in everyday activities. About 30% of Latino youth surveyed avoided driving, extracurricular activities, religious services, and community events due to fear of immigration enforcement with ICE or CBP—or ‘la migra’, as it’s known in Spanish-speaking migrant communities.

The fear of deportation is closely linked to perceived discrimination. Those who feared deportation of someone close were more likely to feel discriminated against in society, leading to increased anxiety and feelings of not belonging. Even U.S.-born youth (22% in the MPI study mentioned above) changed their behavior due to fears that their activities could lead to a family member's deportation, indicating that the "out of place" feeling extends beyond immigrants themselves. These factors combine to create an environment where many migrants, regardless of their legal status, feel constantly on edge and out of place in their communities.⁸ The fear of enforcement, coupled with experiences of discrimination and the need to alter normal behaviors, contributes to a persistent sense of not belonging or feeling "out of place" in what may be their long-term home.

Despite the structural limitations and the seemingly insurmountable challenges, migrants are actively organizing to disrupt⁹ these patterns through acting upon their agency and embracing their own political subjectivities. Gabriela and Kaxh demonstrate how migrants actively negotiate with various actors like coyotes, border patrol, and other migrants to circumvent the wide-ranging state surveillance and control that is enacted through immigration enforcement mechanisms.



Gabriela Castañeda leads a Border Network for Human Rights demonstration in El Paso, Texas

BORDERLAND examines a long-standing counter-narrative about immigrants: they are not victims nor criminals, they are advocates creating a movement in spite of the power structures that dehumanizes and criminalizes them. By highlighting migrant agency and their political subjectivity, *BORDERLAND* reveals borders as contested and ubiquitous sites of negotiation rather than just lines of state control. By recognizing migrant agency, we can better understand migration as a complex social process shaped by both structural forces and individual/collective action, and begin to demystify the toxic narratives about the border.

Discussion Questions

- *How did you come to be here in the U.S.? Were your ancestors here when the Europeans arrived? Were your ancestors brought here as enslaved people? Did your ancestors flee dictators, or were they facing starvation? What are your family stories of the heroism (or villainy) of your ancestors? That's horizontal thinking. Now think vertically. What is the land you are on right now? Who were the original people on this land, or the different people who inhabited this place?*
- *How is immigration policy discussed in the general public such as the media?*
- *During the film, digital humanist and xpMethod team member Alex Gil talks about the "ubiquity of the border." What does it mean that "the border is everywhere and inside us" when he refers to immigrants in the United States?*
- *How do Gabriela and Kaxh discuss the border? How has it impacted their lives?*

Part II - Migration to the United States

The history of the United States immigration policy¹⁰ is rooted in white supremacy, and the racialization of immigrants as backwards, lazy, inferior and poor, all which served as a form of dehumanization. Immigration laws have been inherently racist from the nation's onset. Evidence of this begins with the Naturalization Act of 1790, which limited citizenship to “free white persons” of “good moral character,” explicitly excluding Native Americans, Eastern Europeans, Jewish peoples, indentured servants, slaves, free blacks, and Asians. Moreover, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 prohibited the immigration of Chinese laborers, and targeted a nationality for exclusion. Racialization of immigrants works beyond skin color.



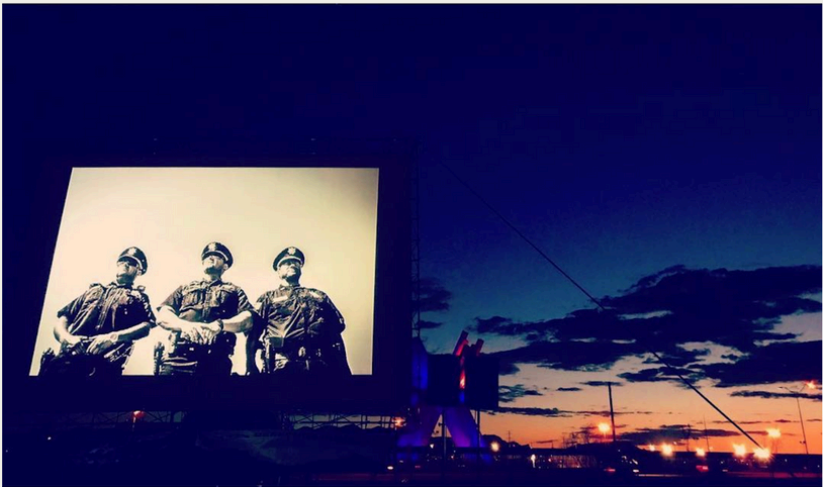
Border Patrol agent deliberately pours out water bottles left on the migrant trails in the Sonoran desert by humanitarian aid workers of No More Deaths/No Más Muertes. Summer temperatures can reach 120 degrees F

At the turn of the 20th Century, the Immigration Act of 1917 created the “Asiatic Barred Zone,” which banned immigration from most of Asia and the Pacific Islands. It also imposed a literacy test on immigrants. Shortly thereafter, the Emergency Quota Act of 1921 established nationality-based quotas that heavily favored Northern and Western European countries while limiting immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe, followed by the Immigration Act of 1924 (Johnson-Reed Act), which further restricted immigration by reducing quotas and setting them based on 2% of each nationality's population in the U.S. as of the 1890 census. This system was designed to preserve the ethnic composition of the U.S., favoring “desirable” immigrants from Northern and Western Europe. These laws demonstrate a pattern of using immigration policy to maintain a preferred racial and ethnic composition in the United States, often based on beliefs about racial superiority and inferiority.

They reflect the racialization of immigrants and the use of legislation to exclude or limit groups deemed undesirable based on their national origin or ethnicity.

The Border Patrol was created in 1924, in which early Border Patrol officers were recruited from organizations with a history of racial violence and brutality, such as the Ku Klux Klan. A 2021 study by the American Immigration Council found that there exists an internal and long “persistent culture of racism” in the Border Patrol. Agents and officials have engaged in racist behaviors and treatment against migrants who are dehumanized with racial and derogatory slurs such as “filthy Indian”, “wetback”, “beaners”, “savages”, among others. In the 1950s, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) carried out “Operation Wetback”, which led to approximately more than a million Mexican nationals to be deported.

Today, the current state of deportation in the United States is characterized by a significant focus on border enforcement rather than interior removals. From a wider perspective, we know that economic anxiety is a significant factor contributing to xenophobic and anti-immigrant sentiment. Economic downturns often exacerbate fears about job security and resource allocation, leading to scapegoating of immigrants as the cause of economic woes that can contribute to anti-immigrant legislation such as Proposition 187 in California, and SB 1070 in Arizona. Such policies are often fueled by the perception that immigrants compete with native-born citizens for jobs and resources despite evidence that immigrants contribute positively to the economy. This economic anxiety, coupled with political narratives, can intensify xenophobic attitudes and support for stringent immigration enforcement measures.



Border Network for Human Rights educational film projection along the border wall

Between 1945 and 2024, immigration policy in the United States underwent significant [changes](#). Initially, policies favored Europeans, as the previous legislation enacted.¹¹ The Civil Rights Movement significantly influenced U.S. immigration policy by leading to the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which abolished the national origins quota system and shifted towards family reunification and skills-based migration. The 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act marked a shift by ending the national origins quota system and opening doors to immigrants from Asia and Latin America. This change led to a significant immigration from Asia and Latin America rather than Europe. The Act also created a permanent admissions category for **refugees** and set limits on immigration from the Western Hemisphere.

Subsequent laws focused on refugees, such as the Refugee Act of 1980, which established the modern U.S. refugee system and provided pathways to permanent residence for refugees and asylees. Additionally, the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 aimed to address undocumented immigration by granting legalization to millions, mainly from Latin America, and imposing sanctions on employers hiring unauthorized immigrants. More recent changes include executive actions like **Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)** under President Obama in 2012, which set particular guidelines that allowed undocumented people who were physically present in the U.S. at least five years before June 15, 2012 and were brought over when they were children.¹² Those who qualified for DACA were deferred from deportation and have to renew this status every two years.

Timeline of Key Dates in U.S. Immigration Policy (1776-2024)

1790	The federal government requires two years of residency for naturalization, limiting citizenship to free whites of "good moral character."
1882	The Chinese Exclusion Act is passed, marking the first significant law restricting nationality-based immigration.
1924	The Immigration Act establishes fixed quotas based on national origin and eliminates immigration from East Asia.
1942	Bracero Agreement: Initiated due to labor shortages during World War II, this agreement allowed Mexican nationals to enter the U.S. as temporary agricultural workers. The program continued until 1964
1943	The Magnuson Act repeals the Chinese Exclusion Act, allowing Chinese immigrants to become eligible for U.S. citizenship.
1965	The Immigration and Nationality Act abolishes the quota system, favoring family reunification and skilled workers.
1986	The Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) grants legalization to millions of undocumented immigrants and imposes sanctions on employers hiring unauthorized workers
1990	The TPS, or "temporary protective status", shields immigrants from deportation due to extraordinary conditions, such as natural disasters or armed conflicts.
1994	President Clinton's "prevention through deterrence," known as Operation Gatekeeper, blocked popular crossing spots and forced migrants into dangerous desert areas and river crossings.
2003	Following the 9/11 attacks, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is established by combining parts of 22 different federal departments and agencies into a unified entity.
2012	President Obama's executive action establishes DACA, allowing young adults brought to the U.S. "illegally" as children to apply for protection from deportation.
2019	The Trump administration enacts a slate of immigration restrictions, including the Muslim Ban, and the family separation policy, and completes 500 miles of the U.S./Mexico border wall.
2020 - 2023	President Trump enacted and President Biden continued Title 42, which allows for the immediate expulsion of migrants without due process.

Uncovering the Root Causes of Migration

The root causes of migration to the United States from Central America and other regions are complex and multifaceted, extending beyond simplistic narratives of poverty and violence. While economic hardship and security concerns are significant factors, they are often symptoms of deeper structural issues shaped by historical and ongoing interventions.



General Benedicto Lucas García in a helicopter gunship during the Guatemalan genocide in 1982
(Photo: Susan Meiselas_Magnum)

U.S. foreign policy and economic interests have played a substantial role in creating conditions that drive migration. Over a century of U.S. interventionism in Central America, including support for authoritarian regimes and counterinsurgency operations during the Cold War, have left lasting impacts on governance and social stability in the region. These interventions disrupted local economies, exacerbated inequality, and contributed to the weakening of democratic institutions that has an enduring legacy on how countries politically operate today. Additionally, U.S.-backed economic policies and trade agreements have often favored multinational corporations at the expense of local communities, leading to displacement and economic insecurity. The militarization of the war on drugs has further destabilized communities and fueled violence, while failing to address the root causes of drug trafficking.

Moreover, environmental degradation and climate change, often led and made worse by extractive industries supported by foreign investment, have also become significant drivers of migration. Large-scale mining, agribusiness, and energy projects have led to land grabs, deforestation, and water pollution, undermining traditional livelihoods and forcing communities to relocate.¹³ Climate change-induced droughts, hurricanes, and other extreme weather events have devastated agricultural communities, particularly in the “Dry Corridor” of Central America, pushing many to migrate in search of economic stability. These environmental pressures intersect with and amplify existing social and economic vulnerabilities, creating a complex web of factors that contribute to the decision to migrate.



Controlled mining explosions in forest from the film 500 YEARS (Photo: Skylight)

The End Game

We must recognize that we are undergoing a historical juncture characterized by growing xenophobia and a popularly-embraced anti-immigrant sentiment. This trend is fueled by political rhetoric that scapegoats immigrants for broader societal issues. As a result, policies and public attitudes are increasingly shaped by fear rather than facts, leading to the erosion of rights and dignity for immigrant communities. Addressing this challenge requires a concerted effort to counter misinformation and advocate for more humane and inclusive policies.

Former government officials are voicing these ideas for mass deportation in a document that includes a series of transformations that channel the anti-immigrant sentiment. For example, Project 2025 aims to enact immigration reform by proposing a series of harsh and unprecedented policies that would significantly restrict immigration and reshape the immigration system in the United States.¹⁴

Some key components of Project 2025's immigration reform plan include ramping up ideological screening for legal immigrants, aiming to reject applicants deemed “Marxists” and other “undesirable ideologies.” Another proposal expands on the previous “Muslim ban” idea to block more individuals from certain Islamic countries from entering the U.S., extending restrictions on immigration based on nationality and religion. The plan aims to end birthright citizenship for children of undocumented immigrants, a significant departure from current policies, and includes provisions for quickly deporting migrant gang members, smugglers, and other criminals using specific legal acts like the Alien Enemies Act.¹⁵ The plan also seeks to complete the border wall along the southern border, which was a feature of former President Trump's first term but halted by President Biden. Overall, Project 2025's immigration reform agenda is characterized by stringent measures that aim to limit legal immigration channels, enhance border security through military involvement, and impose restrictions based on ideology and nationality.

Discussion Questions

- *What were the implications of U.S. immigration policy on the protagonists' lives in BORDERLAND?*
- *How do the protagonists discuss the Border Industrial Complex? According to the documentary, how is U.S. taxpayer money spent on this?*
- *In what ways are immigrants in BORDERLAND organizing for their rights in the United States?*

Part III - Maya History and Identity



Caba Caba Family in Ilo, Nebaj, Guatemala from the film “Granito: How to Nail a Dictator”
(Photo: Dana Lixenberg)

In *BORDERLAND*, Kaxh Mura'l is forced to flee from Guatemala to the U.S. due to his work as an anti-mining activist and **human rights defender**. He is an Ixil Maya from Nebaj, located in the Western Highlands of Guatemala. Dr. Giovanni Batz was born and raised in Los Angeles and identifies as K'iche' Maya, and is an Assistant Professor at the University of California Santa Barbara. These two protagonists in the film form part of different segments of the Maya Peoples. In popular media and in some academic texts, the Mayas are often portrayed as being in the past, as not existing anymore, or presented in an exotic or essentialist manner.

Who are the Maya? When did Maya migration to the U.S. begin? How does Kaxh's story inform us of the structural inequalities and ongoing resistance against colonialism? To answer some of these questions, in this section we explore:

- Who, What, Where and When are the Maya?
- The Guatemalan Civil War
- Maya Migration
- Maya Resistance and Cultural Identity

Who, What, Where and When are the Maya?

Today, when people think about the Maya they think of “ancient civilizations” and are a thing of the past. The gross and exotic misrepresentation of Mayas in the media show them as having been supported by aliens to build their structures, and the end of the world.



Cheering at guilty verdict in genocide trial of General Ríos Montt from “500 Years”
(Photo: Daniel Hernández Salazar)

The Maya Peoples form part of a larger network of Mesoamerican cultures and peoples, which includes other Indigenous groups such as the Olmec, Zapotec and Mixtecos, and which encompasses what is today Central and Southern Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, Honduras and El Salvador. Mesoamerican cultures dates back to 1800 BC. During what archaeologists call the “**Classic Period**” (200-900 AD), the Maya had a cultural florescence which saw the development of sophisticated calendars, astronomical systems, writings, architecture, and math. It was during the Classic Period that Tikal, Palenque, Copán, and Chichen Itza were built. While for reasons unknown, these Maya civilizations “collapsed” between 800-900 AD, most likely due to several interrelated factors such as demographic changes, climate change, the Maya continued to live and exist and did not “disappear”. The time after the Classic Period is known as the **Post-Classic Period** which began approximately 900 AD and ended with the Spanish Invasion. During the Post-Classic Period, several Indigenous and Maya communities continued to engage in technological advancements in architecture, engineering and weaponry.

The Spanish and European Invasion of what we know today as the Americas, began in 1492 and continues today. Maya Peoples experienced genocide and colonial rule by the Spanish. In order to maintain control, the Spanish imposed several colonial ideologies such as a racial hierarchy through the *casta* system, a patriarchal gender binary and Christianity. For example, under the **casta system**, Europeans were associated with civilization, beauty, intelligence, and superiority, while Indigenous and Black Peoples were viewed as uncivilized, savages, backwards, superstitious, and inferior. While nation-states like Guatemala would claim “Independence” in 1821, the Maya have continued to be repressed by these governments. Unfortunately today, Guatemala society tends to view Indigenous peoples and cultures in a negative way.

Today, the Maya live in what is known today as Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, Honduras and El Salvador. In recent decades, the Maya have formed communities outside of their ancestral territories in the United States, Canada and elsewhere. There are thirty Maya languages spoken today: K’iche’, Ixil, Kaqchikel, Mam, Q’anjob’al, Yucatec, Chontal, Ch’ol, Ch’orti’, Tzeltal, Tzotzil, Tének, Chuj, Tojolab’al, Jakaltek, Akatek, Mocho’, Awakatek, Tektitek, Q’eqchi’, Poqomam, Poqomchi’, Achi, Tz’utujil, Sakapultek, Sipakapense, Uspantek, Itza’, Mopan, and Lacandon. Twenty-two of these Maya Peoples live in Guatemala, and make up the majority of the population.

While there have been centuries of repression, there is also resistance in many ways. Oftentimes, there exists the **dominant narrative** that the Maya “disappeared” or were “conquered”, disregarding the historical resistance that they have engaged in to defend their territories and promote their collective well-being. In his book, Dr. Batz examines the “**four invasions**” in the Ixil Region, in which he examines how the arrival of extractivist industries in Guatemala has been referred to as a “new invasion” or “fourth invasion,” the previous three being: Spanish colonization; creation of the plantation economy beginning in the late 19th century; and state-sponsored genocide during the war.



U.S. military advisor and Maya women in Nebaj, Guatemala in 1982 from the film “Granito”
(Photo: Jean-Marie Simon)

During the Guatemalan Civil War (1960-1996),¹⁶ the Maya were targeted by the Guatemalan armed forces. A United Nations Truth Commission report found that 200,000 died, 83% were Indigenous, and the military was responsible for 93% of these deaths.¹⁷ The report states that the Guatemalan government committed “acts of genocide” against the Maya. Forced displacement and migration increased during the war and saw thousands of Mayas and Guatemalans migrate to the United States, where they settled in cities and areas such as Los Angeles, New York, Houston, the Bay Area and Southern Florida. Following the war, many Mayas continued to migrate to places such as Alabama, New Mexico, Nebraska, Ohio, and the D.C. area.¹⁸

While the Peace Accords ended the war, neoliberal policies, structural inequalities, widespread corruption, and impunity have continued to negatively impact Maya communities. As Kaxh explains in the *BORDERLAND* he was resisting mining, which he claims contributed to the threats he received. In Guatemala, there are nearly 300 mining exploitation licenses to extract natural minerals and metals such as gold, silver, nickel, and barite. National mining revenues reached their peak in 2011 with US\$943 million, and in 2020 generated \$126.74 million. While mining generates large amounts of income, it contributes little to Guatemala’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP). For instance, in 2020, according to the Ministry of Mines and Energy (MEM), mining comprised only 0.79% of the country’s total GDP. According to Dr. Batz, “A significant correlation exists between the communities that suffered massacres during the war, those impacted by extractivist industries, and communities with high migration rates.”¹⁹

For instance, many Maya migrate from the departments (states) of Huehuetenango, San Marcos, El Quiché and Quetzaltenango to the United States; — all of which suffered heavily from wartime massacres and genocide. In these same departments, hydroelectric plants and mining have operated or planned to be built.”

While extractivist industries have caused social divisions, militarization, and the persecution of community leaders, stories such as Kaxh’s illustrate ongoing resistance efforts to historical colonial violence. Although he is no longer in Guatemala, he has continued to denounce the structural inequalities and state-sponsored violence that forced him to migrate.



Nobel Peace Laureate Rigoberta Menchú speaks with genocide survivor at trial of General Ríos Montt from film “500 Years” (Photo: Daniel Hernández Salazar)

Discussion Questions

- What have you heard about the Maya Peoples before watching the documentary?
- Consider the ways Indigenous Peoples and Native Nations are depicted in the media. How are these depictions challenged by what you saw during *BORDERLAND*?
- How does *BORDERLAND* and its protagonists describe and discuss Maya Peoples?

Part IV - Academics and Community-Based Research



DHS surveillance drone over U.S. city

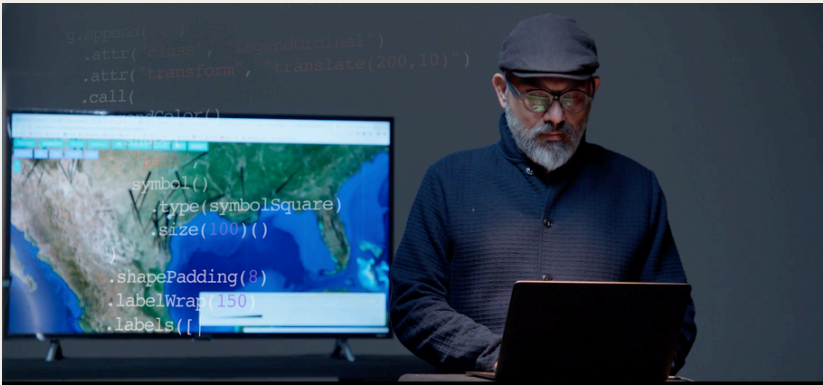
In *BORDERLAND*, researchers such as Alex Gil of the **xpMethod** at Columbia University, use their knowledge to further understand the **Border Industrial Complex**. Members of the xpMethod show through data, maps and figures, how ICE uses mundane sites like a shopping mall as a detention center. They show how these detention centers are scattered around the country, from California, to Texas, to the Midwest. *BORDERLAND* is a testament of how academics (and filmmakers) can use their research towards social justice, and raising awareness to human rights abuses.

In this section, we explore:

- What is research? How do **digital humanists** produce research and publications?
- The ethical dilemmas confronted by academics in conducting research in areas such as immigration
- Activist and Community-Based Research Methods that students can think about as they continue their studies

There are several ways of conducting research. For instance, some disciplines and fields of studies may focus on **qualitative methods**, which is non-numerical data that seeks to understand people's attitudes, beliefs, and characteristics. Qualitative research can include interviews, observation, **ethnography** and case study research. Other fields may privilege **quantitative methods**, which is numerical data to understand behavior and make meaning using mathematical techniques (mean, medians, standard deviations). Quantitative research includes surveys, experiments, questionnaires, among others.

It is mentioned in the documentary that Dr. Batz conducted research in Guatemala, where he met Kaxh. Batz conducted **ethnography**, which is the immersion of investigators in the lives of the people in an attempt to attain some level of understanding of the meanings those people ascribe to their experience. Ethnography includes **participant observation**, or the active participation of observers in the lives of the people and/or communities they are working with. **Notetaking** is also an important practice of recording information captured from another source.



Dr. Manan Ahmed researches and then codes to create a data visualization of people deported

In the documentary, the xpMethod used quantitative methods such as maps and figures to determine the location of detention centers. The artistic visualization of their data is crucial, as it makes their research accessible to several academic and non-academic publics. The dissemination of their findings is thus strengthened by these creative and rigorous techniques.

While research may seem harmless, the unfortunate reality is that previous researchers engaged in unethical practices. For instance, in the late 19th and early 20th century, some anthropologists practiced what is known today as “Salvage Anthropology.” The term coined sometime in the 1960s, describes anthropologists who believed that Native Americans and Indigenous Peoples and culture would eventually “vanish” and disappear due to modernization and colonialism. Researchers then began efforts to document Indigenous cultural practices, which they predicted would become extinct. This belief would contribute and be the basis for unethical practices such as grave robbing, or taking pictures without consent of the people being photographed, among others. As a result, thousands of human remains, artifacts, sacred, and cultural items are now housed in museums, universities, and private collections.

Another example of unethical research involved medical studies and human experiments on African-Americans and Guatemalans. In the notorious Tuskegee Experiments (1932-1972) the United States Public Health Service and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention infected at least 400 African American men with syphilis. Alarming, the men were not told about the intent of the study and did not provide consent; as a result, at least 100 men died in the experiment. The same researchers would infect sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) to Guatemalans in the 1940s, which went untreated. According to one 2012 study published in *Nature*,²⁰ these unethical practices that the “US government researchers and their Guatemalan colleagues experimented without consent on more than 5,000 Guatemalan soldiers, prisoners, people with psychiatric disorders, orphans and prostitutes. The investigators exposed 1,308 adults to syphilis, gonorrhea or chancroid, in some cases using prostitutes to infect prisoners and soldiers.”

Today, researchers attempt to avoid reproducing harm. Due to the legacies of the harm committed by previous researchers as described above, some safeguards were created such as the **Institutional Review Boards** (IRBs), which can approve or disapprove research. Researchers have also developed several methodologies and approaches to best reduce and/or avoid unethical research practices and harm. This includes community-based research, activist anthropology/research, among others.

There are two places in *BORDERLAND* where information is obtained through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). The first is when the xpMethod digital humanists talk about getting their government contracts data from a FOIA request that yielded important documents and then creatively visualizing the data. The second time is when Director Pamela Yates filed a lawsuit, *Skylight v. DHS*, to obtain filmed material from a Border Patrol Tactical Unit (BORTAC) raid on the No More Deaths humanitarian aid camp in Arizona, near the border. Her FOIA request and subsequent lawsuit took two years to yield the resulting filmed material.



BORTAC raid on No More Deaths humanitarian aid camp in Arizona, obtained using the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)

The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), is a U.S. law that allows individuals to request access to federal agency records. The purpose of FOIA is to promote transparency and accountability by making government information available to the public, except for certain exempted records. In other words, using FOIA you can obtain most documents from the government. The government of the United States is required to be transparent with its citizens when we request information from them, with only a few exceptions like private information or top secrets.

Here's a brief breakdown of how it works and some tips for filing one:

What is a FOIA request?

- **Purpose:** To obtain access to federal agency records, such as documents, emails, and reports.
- **Eligibility:** Anyone can file a FOIA request, including U.S. citizens, foreign nationals, and organizations.
- **Exemptions:** Some information may be withheld due to exemptions, such as national security, personal privacy, or law enforcement matters.

How to File a FOIA Request

- 1. Identify the Right Agency:** Determine which federal agency is likely to have the records you're seeking. FOIA applies only to federal agencies, not to state or local government records.
- 2. Write Your Request**
 - **Be Specific:** Clearly describe the records you are seeking. The more specific your request, the easier it will be for the agency to locate the information.
 - **Include Relevant Details:** Mention dates, names, subjects, or other relevant information to narrow down the search.
 - **State Your Preference:** Indicate whether you want the information in electronic or paper format, if applicable.
- 3. Submit Your Request:**
 - **Format:** You can usually submit your request in writing via mail, email, or through an agency's online FOIA request system if available.
 - **Address:** Send it to the agency's FOIA office. Many agencies have a specific FOIA contact or submission portal on their website.
- 4. Fees:** *Understand Costs:* Agencies may charge fees for searching, reviewing, and copying records. Some requests, especially those by journalists or non-profits, might be eligible for fee waivers or reductions.
- 5. Appeal:** If your request is denied or you are unsatisfied with the response, you can file an appeal with the agency. If the appeal is unsuccessful, you can challenge the decision in court.

Discussion Questions

- *How did the documentary and its protagonists discuss research?*
- *Did you find the xpMethod useful for your own understanding of the Border Industrial Complex?*
- *Come up with an idea for filing a FOIA request around immigration information from the Federal government. Go [here](#) and follow the steps above.*

Part V - What can we do?



Gabriela Castañeda leads a leadership training class as part of MILPA, the Movement of Immigrant Leaders in Pennsylvania

BORDERLAND shows us the burgeoning immigrant rights movement in the United States that is strengthening communities. Through the assertion of their inalienable rights, migrants are building grassroots alliances that facilitate dialogue and build solidarity across generations, producing leaders that inspire transformative action. To maximize impact, *BORDERLAND* has worked closely with immigrant-led organizations throughout the production and distribution process, ensuring the film aligns with movement goals and amplifies existing organizing efforts. The film should also provide clear pathways for viewers to support immigrant-led initiatives and get involved in advocacy work.

There are several actions the audience can take to support migrant rights and forge a path forward for migrant rights in the United States.

Educate Yourself: Learn more about the issues affecting migrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers throughout the country. Understanding the root causes of migration and the challenges our communities face is crucial.

Advocate: Use your voice to advocate for fair and just immigration policies. Contact elected officials, participate in rallies or protests, and support campaigns that promote migrant rights. Write opinion editorials for your local newspaper or independent digital platforms.

Donate: Contribute financially to organizations that directly assist migrants and work towards systemic change in immigration policies.

Raise Awareness: Share information about the realities faced by migrants in the borderlands with your community, friends, and family. Help raise awareness about the challenges and injustices migrants experience.

Volunteer: Consider volunteering your time with organizations that provide legal aid, humanitarian assistance, or advocacy support to migrants in need.

Stay Informed: Stay updated on current events and policy changes related to immigration. Being informed allows you to take timely action and support initiatives that promote migrant rights.

Support Organizations: Consider supporting organizations that contributed to our understanding towards the making of *BORDERLAND I The Line Within*, working to protect migrant rights and advocate for humane immigration policies.



Fernando García (center) Founder of the Border Network for Human Rights, and Dr. Rev. William Barber (L) and Dr. Rev. Liz Theoharis (R) Co-chairs of the Poor People's Campaign as well as other national religious leaders speak out against family separation at the ICE detention center in El Paso, Texas. (Photo: Skylight)

Border Network for Human Rights

The Border Network for Human Rights ([BNHR](#)) is a nonprofit organization in El Paso, Texas, that advocates for immigration reform and human rights. The organization's mission is to create political, economic, and social conditions where every human being is equal in dignity and rights. BNHR documents cases of abuse of immigrants by United States Government authorities and works within the system to combat human rights and civil rights abuses.



Ivonne Pinto-García MILPA leader and Kaxh Mura'l speak before a MILPA event in Philadelphia, PA

MILPA

The Movement of Immigrant Leaders in Pennsylvania ([MILPA](#)) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to fighting for every person's dignity and human rights, regardless of immigration status. MILPA is actively engaged in activism to advocate for immigrant rights and social justice in Pennsylvania. The organization focuses on empowering immigrant communities, promoting unity, and strengthening the movement for human rights. MILPA's history is rooted in its commitment to supporting immigrants and their families by addressing issues such as access to driver's licenses, economic opportunities, and keeping families together.

The organization organizes events, such as rallies and days of action at the Harrisburg Capitol, to support bills like HB769, which aims to expand access to driver's licenses in Pennsylvania. Through initiatives like Radio MILPA, an online radio platform that connects communities across Pennsylvania, MILPA provides a platform for sharing stories, music, leadership reports, member testimonials, and updates on their advocacy efforts. By amplifying the voices of immigrant leaders and engaging in grassroots activism, MILPA contributes significantly to advancing immigrant rights and fostering a more inclusive society in Pennsylvania.

Armadillos Search and Rescue

The [Armadillos Search and Rescue](#) group is an immigrant-led humanitarian organization that plays a crucial role in supporting immigrants' rights, particularly in the context of the challenging terrain of the Sonoran Desert in southern Arizona. Founded by César Ortigoza, a naturalized U.S. citizen who crossed the border alone at age 15, the Armadillos Search and Rescue group is known for its aggressive civilian efforts in search for and assist migrants in distress, and to search for remains.



Luis Osuna searches for missing migrants in the vast Sonoran desert

No More Deaths / No Más Muertes

[No More Deaths](#) is a nonprofit organization based in southern Arizona that focuses on providing humanitarian aid and support to migrants in the US-Mexico borderlands. Founded in 2004 as a coalition of community and faith groups, the organization aims to end death and suffering in the border regions through civil initiatives that uphold fundamental human rights. No More Deaths provides direct aid, witnessing and responding to human rights violations, consciousness-raising, global movement building, and encouraging humane immigration policy.



Shrine to those who died trying to cross the border wall from Mexico to the U.S.

American Immigration Council

The [American Immigration Council](#) (AIC) is a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit organization and advocacy group that was established in 1987. They conduct research, policy analysis, and provide legal resources for attorneys. They also produce resources for public education, engage in grassroots and direct advocacy, and file litigation related to immigration issues. AIC represented the filmmakers in the case *Skylight v. DHS* get filmed footage of the Border Patrol Raid on the No More Deaths camp.

International Mayan League

The [International Mayan League](#) in the United States is a Maya organization that promotes, preserves, and transmits their ancestors' cosmivision, worldview, culture, history, and contributions. They work to address current threats and violations affecting their peoples, the earth, and humanity by creating a link between contemporary society and ancestral traditions. The organization is committed to respecting the diversity of their Nation while building a shared vision with their peoples and collaborating with other Indigenous groups, organizations, and allies who share their beliefs and values.

Washington Office on Latin America

The Washington Office on Latin America ([WOLA](#)) is a prominent research and advocacy organization dedicated to advancing human rights and social justice in the Americas. WOLA's work is deeply intertwined with immigration from Latin America, mainly focusing on addressing the root causes of migration and advocating for policies that protect human rights in the region. WOLA plays a crucial role in advocating for reforms that address the [root causes](#) of violence in Central American countries, which are significant drivers of migration to the United States. The organization works with partners in the region to promote policies that ensure accountable police and judicial systems, protect the rights and security of the population and monitor the impact of reform efforts on the ground.

The Border Chronicle

[The Border Chronicle](#) is a weekly newsletter that publishes original, on-the-ground reporting, analysis, and commentary focusing on the U.S.-Mexico border region. It covers significant issues challenging the area, such as climate change, economic inequality, government surveillance, and the rapid growth of the border security industrial complex. The newsletter aims to challenge preconceived notions about the borderlands and create a community of ideas to break free from the "crisis" narrative that often dominates regional discussions. The Border Chronicle is run by Melissa del Bosque and Todd Miller, both longtime journalists based in Tucson, Arizona, with extensive experience writing about border communities in Mexico and the United States. They have a combined 40 years of experience in reporting for various media outlets like *The New York Times* and *In These Times*, as well as writing books on border-related topics.

Part VI - Glossary: Terms to Know

TERM	DEFINITION
Asylum	A fundamental human right protected by international law, allowing individuals to seek protection from persecution in another country. Asylum seekers are those who have left their country due to persecution or serious human rights violations but have not yet been legally recognized as refugees. Asylum seekers must prove that they face a credible fear of death or violence for their case to be granted asylum. It also involves a complex process, criminal background checks, and security screenings.
Border Industrial Complex	The border industrial complex is a system involving the collaboration between governments and private industry to manage border security and immigration enforcement. This complex has significantly expanded over the years, with the US border and immigration budget growing from \$1.5 billion in 1994 to over \$24 billion in 2024.
Casta System	The caste system in colonial Latin America was a hierarchical social structure based primarily on racial categories, with Europeans at the top, mixed-race individuals in the middle, and Indigenous and Afro-descendant Peoples at the bottom. This system, which assigned different rights, privileges, and social status based on a person's perceived racial background, was used by Spanish and Portuguese colonizers to maintain power and control over the population, influencing social, economic, and political dynamics well beyond the colonial period.
Credible Fear	In the context of asylum, "credible fear" refers to the significant possibility that an individual could establish, in a full hearing before an Immigration Judge, that they have been persecuted or have a well-founded fear of persecution or harm based on their race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion if returned to their country.

Customs and Border Patrol (CBP)	The U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) was established on March 1, 2003, as the nation's first comprehensive border security agency within the Department of Homeland Security
Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)	Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) allows people who were brought into the United States as children to have temporary legal status as immigrants and protects them from deportation.
Department of Homeland Security (DHS)	The United States Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is a federal executive department responsible for national public security, encompassing anti-terrorism, border security, immigration and customs, cyber security, and disaster prevention and management.
Digital Humanities	Digital humanism in practice involves the application of digital technologies with a focus on humanistic values to improve lives and society. Like the scholars working with the xpMethod, digital humanists work collaboratively on research projects that involve applying digital tools and methods to analyze and interpret texts and data.
Dominant Narrative	Widely accepted and frequently repeated stories or perspectives that shape societal beliefs and values, often reflecting the viewpoints of the most privileged or powerful groups. Dominant narratives can influence how history is interpreted and how individuals perceive their roles within society, often reinforcing existing power dynamics and cultural norms.
Environmental Defender	An individual or group who takes peaceful action to protect environmental rights or land rights, often in the face of significant risks and threats. Environmental defenders work to safeguard ecosystems, biodiversity, and natural resources, frequently challenging powerful interests such as corporations or governments engaged in environmentally destructive practices.

**Human Rights
Defender**

Human Rights Defenders peacefully promote and protect human rights, often at significant personal risk. They work to ensure the rights of others are respected, protected, and fulfilled, advocating for justice, equality, and accountability.

**Immigration and
Customs
Enforcement
(ICE)**

The U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) was created in 2003 as part of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in response to the 9/11 attacks, replacing the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). ICE's formation marked a significant shift in immigration enforcement towards a more aggressive approach, focusing on identifying and removing undocumented immigrants deemed threats to national security or public safety.

Immigrant

An immigrant resides in a country other than their birth country, regardless of whether they have acquired citizenship, served in the military, married a native, or hold another status.

Refugee

According to international law, a refugee is defined as a person who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of their nationality.

Part VII - Resources for Educators

GABRIELA CASTAÑEDA is a human rights defender and immigrant leadership trainer. She is a force in organizing the undocumented immigrant community to know and exercise their civil rights. From her personal experience coming from Mexico and being undocumented in the U.S., she rose to become the Communications Director at the Border Network for Human Rights and is now the Communications Director with MILPA, the Movement of Immigrant Leaders in Pennsylvania, developing local and national leadership..

KAXH MURA'L (previously known by his colonial name Gaspar Cobo) is an environmental defender of his ancestral lands in the Maya-Ixil region of Guatemala. Organizing to keep mining companies from extracting barite, a mineral used in fracking, Kaxh began to receive death threats for his work while others in his circle were assassinated. He fled to save his life, hoping to seek asylum in the U.S.

ALEX GIL, Ph.D., author, and a Yale University professor of Digital Humanities - a field of study, research, teaching, and innovation concerned with the intersection of digital tech and the disciplines of the humanities - literature, history, and philosophy. He and others began the xpMethod, Columbia University's group for experimental methods in the humanities, where they created the *Torn Apart / Separados* project, searching for children and parents who had been separated as they tried to enter the U.S. Alex was born and raised in the Dominican Republic.

ROOPIKA RISAM, Ph.D. and a Dartmouth College professor of Film and Media Studies and Comparative Literature, is part of the Digital Humanities and Social Engagement Cluster there. She is the Editor of Digital Humanities Review and was part of the *Torn Apart/Separados* project featured in the film *BORDERLAND*. Her family is from the Kashmir region between India and Pakistan.

MANAN AHMED, Ph.D., author, and Columbia University professor of History, regularly teaches the course *Borderlands: Towards the Spatial History of Empire*. He is a member of Columbia's [Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Race](#) and has an extensive background in digital history, the history of archives in the global south, and the problems of access and control to digitized materials. He was part of the *Torn Apart/ Separados* project, which focused on the U.S./Mexico border humanitarian crisis. Manan was born and raised in Pakistan.

GIOVANNI BATZ, Ph.D. is an Assistant Professor at the University of California at Santa Barbara in the Chicana and Chicano Studies Department. He lived in Las Cruces, New Mexico between 2019-2022 where he was a Visiting Assistant Professor at New Mexico State University (2019-2020); and subsequently during the Covid-19 pandemic. While doing fieldwork in the Ixil region in Guatemala, Giovanni became friends with Kaxh. He lived and conducted research in the Maya-Ixil communities, which led to the writing of his book *La cuarta invasión* (AVANCSO, 2022) and *The Fourth Invasion: Decolonizing Histories, Extractivism, and Maya Resistance in Guatemala* (University of California Press 2024), among other publications.



Fernando García Executive Director of the Border Network for Human Rights

FERNANDO GARCIA is the Co-founder and Executive Director of the Border Network for Human Rights (BNHR). A talented organizer, his expertise lies in connecting the everyday struggle of immigrant and border communities to developing policies that respect the rights and dignity of all residents along the US-Mexico border. Fernando was born in Mexico and lives in El Paso, Texas.

CARLOS SPECTOR is one of the most well-respected immigration lawyers in the country. The son of a Brooklyn Jewish war veteran and a Mexican mother from the border region, he specializes in defending political activists, journalists, and political dissidents seeking asylum in the U.S. “I can’t help everyone,” he says, “but I can help those who will then help others.” Carlos took on Kaxh Mura’l case pro bono, saying, “It is the most important asylum case I have ever done.”



Gabriela Murillo waves to her father across the border in Juárez, Mexico.

GABRIELA MURILLO was a young girl when she appeared in *BORDERLAND*, yet she had no fear of speaking up before a crowd of people, telling them about her personal pain at not being able to see her father who was separated from the family and now lives in Mexico.

LUIS OSUNA is a filmmaker, journalist, and multi-media artist focused on approaching storytelling through a non-extractive, social justice lens. He was a humanitarian aid volunteer for No More Deaths/No Más Muertes and Armadillos Search and Rescue and is currently the Digital Media Director at El Otro Lado, a bi-national advocacy and legal aid organization serving migrants, refugees, and deportees in the United States and Mexico.

REVEREND JOHN FIFE is a human rights activist and retired minister who lives in Tucson, AZ. He was a co-founder in the 1980s of the Sanctuary Movement, which helped people fleeing U.S.-backed death squads in Guatemala and El Salvador cross the border and find sanctuary in the U.S. in defiance of federal immigration law. In the early 2000s, he helped found the humanitarian aid organization No More Deaths/No Más Muertes, where volunteers put food and water on migrant trails in the Sonoran desert to help save lives and offer medical aid at permanent camps.

SABA is a graffiti artist and muralist from the Navajo Nation/Jemez Pueblo (in what's now known as New Mexico) who created the huge permanent mural at the end of *BORDERLAND* during the credit sequence. It reflects on what North-South transnational Indigenous solidarity could be if there were no borders, demonstrating the power of art in visualizing a collective Indigenous future.

SARA CURRUCHICH is an internationally renowned Kaqchikel Maya singer and songwriter from Guatemala. She composed and performed the music for *BORDERLAND* along with ROGER C. MILLER.



Musician **Sara Curruchich** in homage to the dead and disappeared in the Guatemalan genocide
(Photo: Edgar Tuy)



DR. GIOVANNI BATZ is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. In part, his research examines the historical roots of Guatemalan displacement and migration to the U.S., conditions at the U.S.-Mexico .



VACLAV MASEK, born in Guatemala, is a doctoral candidate at the Institute of Environmental Science and Technology at the Autonomous University of Barcelona, studying the political ecology of grassroots environmental movements in post-conflict societies. He is also a freelance journalist covering Latin American social movements in outlets like El País, El Faro, and NACLA Report of the Americas. He writes monthly opinion editorials for elPeriódico and Agencia Ocate in his native Guatemala, and is part of the Skylight SolidariLabs Latin American leadership team, collaborating as BORDERLAND's Impact Campaign Coordinator.

With additional writing by Pamela Yates
And special thanks to Dr. Alex Gil
Design by Valentina Vargas

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