

APPLICATION FOR REVIEW OF THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS
Eliot Scott, Anthropology Department, Portland State University.

I. PROJECT TITLE and PROSPECTUS

The Changing Role of the Mexican US Border: Economics or Ideology?

The two thousand mile long Mexican-US border is perhaps the largest and most well known structure exhibiting the economic inequities of global capitalism. The striking economic contrasts between Mexico and the United States have exemplified this border's purpose and function over the last several decades. Capital and elites have flowed increasingly freely across this border. Meanwhile the less affluent in Mexico have been discouraged from crossing by militaristic and legal displays of power while being simultaneously enticed by higher paying wage labor in US industries on the other side of the border. Some scholars argue that this situation has been highly lucrative for US industries, as this undocumented labor has often been exploited at below market value. However, changes in border operations since 9/11 may have created a situation where the undocumented labor that US industries have come to rely on seems to be increasingly scarce and therefore more expensive than it has been in the past.

The primary purpose of this study is to gather data to understand why the border exists, how the border functions, whom the border serves and whom it affects, and how or if this has changed with recent events. Although this border has been studied extensively over a period of several decades, the policies and structures of the border change periodically. This is particularly true in the recent past, as the United States has been engaged in an escalating buildup of physical structures, militaristic tactics and laws under the guise of homeland security that further prevent people from migrating to the United States.

The past literature on the border has shown that the migration across it is mainly due to economic inequity and that undocumented migrants serve as an inexpensive, easily exploitable workforce for US industries. However, my initial study of this phenomenon shows that although economic issues are still a factor for these migrants in their desire to migrate across the border, they are not the only reasons. Moreover US industries (agriculture in particular) appear to be suffering economic losses due to the increase in border enforcement and a subsequently perceived scarcity of migrant labor. This may be one of the reasons why US industries have lobbied heavily for policy changes to allow foreign guest workers into the US and President Bush is now pushing Congress for new immigration reforms to allow such workers to obtain legal working status. This study will investigate the topic further to discover whether or not economics are still the primary issue surrounding border enforcement, or if factors such as ideology have superseded economics as the primary reason behind the increases in border enforcement.

Methodological Approaches

My research will be a multi perspective study on the current border situation to assess the effect of the post 9-11 federal policy and bureaucracy changes. In order to explore the impact of these policy changes along US-Mexican border, the views of all interested parties must be incorporated. Bureaucratic structures, employers, immigrant

rights groups, anti-immigrant groups, legislators, the general public on both sides of the border, as well as migrants themselves must all be investigated.

The project will require five months of field research at the US-Mexican Border, performed between July – December 2007. Methods will include interviews, observation at the border, and analysis of statistical, archival, and media data. The specific location of this research will be determined depending on the results of an ongoing job search.

II. EXEMPTION CLAIM

Given my chosen research methodology, this project may qualify for expedited review because it focuses on group characteristics and behavior, and I will gather data using surveys, interviews, and observations. But because the project concerns sensitive issues such as undocumented migration, this application may require review by the full Human Subjects Research Review Committee.

III. SUBJECT RECRUITMENT

I will obtain the life histories of 30 or more migrants both documented and undocumented. These life histories will help to reveal the obstacles they faced and the issues concerning their reasons for documented or undocumented migration. (See Appendix D for a list of interview questions). These histories will also aid in assessing the impacts of recent policy and structural changes at the border. I will recruit these subjects using a snowball sampling technique beginning with people I meet at immigrant rights organizations and in my place of employment.

Likewise, I will incorporate the views of employers into the study. (See Appendix E for a list of interview questions). By interviewing 15 or more employers in a variety of industries, my research will reveal a number of issues concerning their role. I will recruit these subjects by targeting industries that have traditionally employed migrant labor (such as agriculture, construction and the service industry) and making cold calls to employers chosen from the yellow pages of my research area (See Appendix F for the telephone recruitment text.).

I will also engage in participant observation by working at a place where large numbers of migrants are employed, such as in agriculture or service. I will need money for subsistence from some form of wage labor regardless, so this labor might as well be related to my research goals. Before collecting any data, I will inform both the employer and all employees of my intent to use information in my thesis project.

Interviewing and observing bureaucracies in action will also be useful in this study. The three key bureaucracies I will investigate are Customs and Border Patrol (CBP), Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and the Social Security Administration (SSA). CBP and ICE are both parts of the Department of Homeland Security as of 2002 and were formerly known as Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) and Border Patrol. These agencies may have changed with their names or they may be very similar in function to the previous agencies. I will interview 5 or more members of each of these institutions and observe their functions at their bases of operation. As a Social Security card is the primary way in which people obtain work authorization, I must also investigate the Social Security Administration. Again observation and interviews conducted with 5 or more members from this agency will give an overview of the issues

they face and give insights as to how they operate (See Appendices G, H and I for interview questions.).

In order to begin to understand the overall social discourse, I will investigate 3 anti immigrant groups, such as the Minuteman Project, and 3 immigrant rights groups, such as the VOZ Workers' Rights Education Project. All such groups will be researched on the web and I will set up interviews with appropriate spokespeople via email (See Appendix J for interview questions.). I will ask at these interviews if I can attend any meetings of their organization. If allowed to attend, I will approach other members and ask for their opinions on immigration matters (See Appendix K for face-to-face recruitment text.).

To understand public attitudes better, I will conduct more interviews and a survey to discover the views of the general public on both sides of the border. This survey will have at least 50 respondents from each side of the border to get an adequate range of opinion. I will recruit these subjects by standing outside grocery stores in several neighborhoods, with permission of grocery store management. I will offer each respondent \$1 dollar. As everyone needs groceries, and everyone can use a dollar to buy a soda or snack, this will assure that a variety of opinions are documented (See Appendix L for survey questions and interview questions).

Finally, once research questions are adequately explored and refined, I will interview several state and/or federal legislators to gain insights into their role in these processes and policies. Do they merely see themselves as enforcing policies that the public demands or do they have other roles? I will contact several members of both major political parties and some minor ones in an attempt to document legislative views from a variety of political backgrounds. My investigation into their role will also include documentary research on their voting record and the policies they have supported. I will submit research questions for HSRRC review once my initial field research has been completed and the issues have become clearer.

I will also observe appropriate areas such as fences and walls at the physical border, as well as the actions of border patrol and customs enforcement at these physical structures. I will accomplish this by legally crossing the border several times over the course of my research to discover what happens at this location.

My methodology will rely primarily on interviews of individuals in each category. This will allow my research to be focused on areas that may yet be unexamined. My participant observation at workplaces will aid in gaining rapport as well as seeing migrant labor and employer behavior in action. My research will cross check the interview data gathered with documents from relevant sources when appropriate.

IV. INFORMED, VOLUNTARY CONSENT IN WRITING

As some of my interviewees will not wish to be known due to having a current or previous undocumented status or may not wish to have any record of their conversation with me, I will not compromise such individuals by having them sign an informed consent letter. In fact I do not wish to know their names. I will read an informed consent script to each vulnerable individual being interviewed (See Appendix A). For individuals who are less vulnerable, such as members of the public, I will hand out a sheet that explains informed consent but that they are not required to sign (See Appendix B). For

persons who are public figures, such as legislators, I will hand out an informed consent sheet that they will sign (See Appendix C).

V. FIRST-PERSON SCENARIO

I. Migrant Interviews

A gringo who knows a friend of mine from work approached me about doing an interview for his thesis research on immigration and border issues. He said he was trying to complete a Masters degree in Anthropology from Portland State University in Oregon where he used to live. He said he wanted to hear my story of how I got here and that he wouldn't use my name or say anything about who helped me to get here. I told him that I would not sign anything, but that I would tell him my story. He asked if he could take some notes and I said that would be OK. He told me that he would destroy them after he transferred them to a password-protected computer. He also said he'd buy me lunch or a cup of coffee or a beer, whatever I'd prefer. I said I'd like just a coffee so we met after work at the shop near my work and we sat down and talked for an hour or so. I told him my story and he took some notes. When I looked at them afterward, I couldn't read them because they contained strange abbreviations and codes that he said he knew but that no one else would. He also allowed me to choose my own pseudonym and I felt that he was really trying to keep me out of trouble and that he was genuinely sympathetic. He asked if I would see if some of my friends who had migrated to the US would speak to him. I said I would.

II. Employer Interviews

Some guy trying to complete a Masters degree in Anthropology from Portland State University called me and asked if he could interview me about immigration and border issues. That's been a really big issue for us in the service industry. He said he wouldn't use my name or the name of the business, just that I was a service industry employer. He seemed like a nice fellow so I said sure why not. We set up a meeting at my office the next day. When he arrived, he gave me a sheet of information about his project so I wouldn't think he was with ICE. He asked if he could take notes and I said I'd rather he didn't. He said that would be fine. I told him about all the problems I've been having with finding workers at rates I can afford to pay, and about troubles I've had in figuring out who's legal and who isn't. Once we got into the interview, I realized I wasn't giving any information that would put me at risk so I let him take some notes provided I could look them over afterward. When I did look them over I couldn't figure out what they meant anyway.

III. Bureaucracy Inquiries

Some white guy came into the office today and said he was from Portland State University and was doing research on border and immigration issues. He asked if there were people in the office who might be willing to speak with him. I told him that there were a couple of people who do that but that he'd have to make an appointment. He said that would be great. After he made some appointments,

he asked if he could just hang around and observe the activities at the office. I didn't think it would be a problem, although I have no idea why anyone would want to sit around at the immigration office all day. I asked security and they said it would be fine. He sat in a chair all day along with many others and didn't cause any problems. He left when we closed.

IV. Immigrant Rights Group Interviews

A new guy showed up at our monthly meeting today. He approached me after the meeting and introduced himself. He said he was working on his Master's thesis in anthropology from Portland State University and was researching border and immigration issues. We had been in contact several days earlier via email. He asked if he could speak with me after the meeting and I said I would love to. He asked if I would sign an informed consent form and I said that I would rather not but I'd be happy to tell him what kind of work we do. He said that would be fine. He asked if he could take some notes on the conversation. I agreed. He assured me that he would not identify me in his work unless I wanted him to. I told him that I would rather he didn't identify me or my affiliation since I am not the public relations person for the organization. He said that would be fine and that he would just say that I was a member of an immigrant rights group. I said that would be OK and we sat down and proceeded to do the interview. We talked for about a half an hour about human rights issues, border patrol policy, and changes since 9-11.

V. Anti-Immigration Group Interviews

Some hippy looking guy showed up at our meeting today. He approached me before the meeting and introduced himself. He said he was working on his Master's thesis in anthropology from Portland State University and was researching border and immigration issues. I then remembered that he had contacted me via email a few days earlier and asked if he could come to the meeting. He asked if he could speak with me after the meeting. I said I would, but that I didn't want him to take notes or identify our organization and that I wasn't signing any of those forms he had. He said that would be fine and read me an oral consent protocol (See Appendix A). We sat down in my office after the meeting and I told him what our organization does and what we stand for for the next half-hour.

VI. Public Surveys

Some guy was standing outside my local grocery store today offering \$1 to fill out a survey. I asked what the survey was on. He said it was on immigration and border issues. I told him I'd love to do a survey on that as its something we discuss at work all the time and that I feel very strongly about. He said if there was anything I felt he left out of the survey that he'd like to talk to me about it as he was working on a Master's thesis in anthropology at Portland State University. I said OK. I filled out the survey and he gave me a dollar. Then he asked if he could talk to me further. He set up a time later in the day and offered to buy me

coffee. He asked me to give him a pseudonym, so I did and I told him what I thought the issues were.

VII. Legislator Interviews

Some guy from Portland State University made an appointment with my secretary to speak with me about an immigration bill I had signed. When he came in he assured me that he was not a journalist and that his work was just to complete a Masters degree in Anthropology. It seemed like a low risk situation and he seemed decent enough so I said I would speak with him. He said that would be fine and asked if he could take notes. I told him that would be fine. He gave me a printout of his oral consent form and asked if I would sign it, so I did. I proceeded to tell him about my votes on several immigration and border bills.

I'm not interested in getting audio tape if I don't have to. It's a pain to transcribe and then I have to rewrite parts of this proposal to include audio tape. I may just be better off cutting this entirely.

VI. POTENTIAL RISKS AND SAFEGUARDS

As many of the populations and individuals to be interviewed during the course of this research may be vulnerable to legal, physical or economic actions taken against them, no identifying information about such individuals will be recorded or revealed in this study. Names of all persons with such vulnerabilities will remain confidential and their whereabouts, and identifiable historical information will remain unrecorded, except in my head. Persons with these vulnerabilities include the migrants, employers, the public and informants from bureaucracies. Members of the other groups to be studied may also choose to have their identities remain confidential and I will honor such requests.

Although I do speak some Spanish, in certain cases I may need an interpreter. Should this become necessary, I will brief the interpreter on informed consent, privacy and confidentiality before involving them in this research.

None of these interviews will be taped. I will rely solely on handwritten notes and memory. The handwritten notes will be transferred to a password-protected computer and destroyed after the interview.

VII. POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF THE PROPOSED STUDY

Although my interview subjects will not benefit directly from the proposed research, future migrants, legislators and employers may benefit if policy makers read the study. If the views of all interested parties are fully explored and their opposing viewpoints are framed in such a way that all parties begin to understand one another, then perhaps the study can serve as a "road map" to "immigration reform" that will benefit all interested parties, and not just those with the most political clout.

My work will contribute to an ongoing debate about the border and immigration. Ethnographic research and anthropological analytic strategies have a lot to offer to the scholarly discussion on this matter.

VIII. RECORDS AND DISTRIBUTION

Research information is for my use exclusively. No one else will have access to the data.

Research materials will consist of handwritten notes and memorization. I will not tape record interviews. If notebooks are used during interviews, they will be locked up when not in my immediate possession and will be destroyed after the information is transferred to a password-protected computer kept in a locked apartment.

In all public documents and presentations, all names and locations of interviews, as well as the names of the people involved, will be changed to protect people's privacy. Strict confidentiality of all information and the cloaking of identities will protect people's privacy, sheltering those who relate potentially embarrassing or damaging information to me. Highly sensitive information will be withheld from publication if there is any chance it could be traced back to its source.

IX. APPENDICES

Appendix A

Oral consent protocol

As mentioned above under section IV, asking people to sign a written consent form could bring a great deal of anxiety to those involved in the research and might discourage many from participating.

I will give a verbal rendition of the informed consent information in English or Spanish. I will hire a native speaker to translate this document and then have it back-translated into English and submitted to the HSRRC for review. Here is the text of the oral consent protocol that I will present to my subjects before I begin an interview:

“I am required to tell you a bit about my research and confirm that you are willing to speak with me today. Please listen carefully for just a few moments.

My name is Eliot Scott, and I am a graduate student in the Anthropology Department at Portland State University. I am doing an academic study regarding immigration and border enforcement. [I will then explain the topic of each interview as appropriate to the interview subject.] [For migrants:] I would like to ask you about your life and how you got to where you are now. [For bureaucracies and legislators:] I would like to ask you how you as a member of the US government feel about the current immigration debate. [For employers:] I would like to ask you about your business and how it is affected by immigration.

If you agree to be interviewed, I will ask to speak with you for [an appropriate amount of time] on this topic at a location and a time that is convenient for you. I do not foresee any risks or harmful effects befalling you due to this interview. You may not receive any direct benefit from taking part in this study, but the study may help to increase knowledge that may help others in the future.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be linked to you or identify you will be kept confidential. In my papers, I change the names of individuals to disguise identity and preserve confidentiality. No one other than myself will have access to this information. My research notebooks are stored in a locked filing

cabinet in a locked apartment, and my final paper will be stored on a password-protected computer, so several safety precautions are in place.

You are under no obligation to speak with me if you do not choose to do so. If you refuse to talk with me, it will not in any way affect your relationship with me. If you do choose to continue with this interview, you are of course free to answer only the questions that you feel comfortable answering. If you do not want to answer a question, please let me know, and we will move on to another topic of discussion.

Do you have any questions?

If you have any questions during our interview, please let me know. If you have questions after our interview is finished, feel free to come talk with me at my address.

If you understand this information and agree to go forward with this interview, please say 'yes' now."