

# CHILDREN IN NO MAN'S LAND

## DISCUSSION GUIDE



### INTRODUCTION:

The goal of this guide is to provide a tool for viewers to engage in dialogue and take action around the documentary CHILDREN IN NO MAN'S LAND.

Every year 100,000 unaccompanied minors risk their lives entering the United States. Some are looking for work; some simply to reunite with their parents. CHILDREN IN NO MANS LAND is a documentary that brings us face to face with this little known, but daily phenomena through the personal experience of Maria de Jesus (13) and her cousin Rene (12) as they attempt to cross the U.S./Mexico border alone to reunite with their mothers in Chicago. The result is a powerful and personal story that challenges us to re-examine a national political debate about the U.S./Mexico border through the experience of one extended family and their collective "American dream."

Set in the Sonora Desert, this documentary follows Maria de Jesus and Rene on their journey to reunite with their mothers. Along the way they will meet other children, negotiate with Coyotes and face deportation.

Have you ever wondered how many of the 3.5 million undocumented immigrants who enter this country annually are children?

Every year, more and more children are immigrating to the United States without a parent or legal guardian. At any given time, an average of 700 unaccompanied minors are being detained by the U.S. Homeland Security Department (formerly known as Immigration and Naturalization Services or I.N.S.). The majority of the 85,000 undocumented immigrants under 17 arrested in 2003 were teenagers, although cases of children as young as 10 traveling alone have been reported. Some of these children come to the United States seeking asylum, others hope to be reunited with family members already living here, and all are simply in search of a better future for themselves.

The film addresses some of the dangers that migrants face in crossing the U.S./Mexico border without documents. In Arizona where the children in the film cross, migrants face extreme heat in the desert. In the fiscal year of 2006, at least 200 people died crossing the border in the state of Arizona, with a total of 442 deaths across the entire U.S./Mexico border.





## FEATURED IN THE FILM:

**Maria de Jesus** is a 13-year-old girl from Puebla, Mexico. She has not seen her mother for seven years. Her grandmother, Adela, has raised Maria de Jesus while her mother, Irma, has been working in Chicago, IL.

**Rene** is a 12-years-old boy, from Puebla, Mexico. It's been over a year since Rene last saw his mother who is now working in Chicago, IL. Along with his cousin, Maria de Jesus, they travel to the U.S./Mexico border with hopes of making it across to reunite with their mothers.

**Irma** is a single mother of five. Six years ago, Irma had to leave her children in the care of her mother, Adela, to migrate to the U.S. to work and send money back to her family.

**Adela** is Irma's mother and Maria de Jesus' and Rene's grandmother. She has raised her grandchildren alone so their mothers can work in the United States.

## FROM THE FILMMAKER:

Born in Panama, my family and I moved to the United States when I was a teenager. I didn't speak English; I lived the immigrant experience, first hand, adapting to a foreign culture and living in a city ten times larger than my entire home country. In 1996, I graduated from Boston University with a B.A. in film and became the first member of my family to attend and graduate college. Needless to say, my experience as an immigrant in the U.S. greatly impacted my life as a citizen and an artist. As a filmmaker, I am re-exploring the immigrant experience through my work.

I've found that people who immigrate to the US do so because they are looking for a better quality of life, often willing to pay any price to survive – even if this means leaving behind their loved ones or risking their own lives. In my debut documentary, MAID IN AMERICA, I explore intimately the lives of three Latina immigrants who leave their families and young children behind in search of a better life in the United States. Ironically, these women find work in homes taking care of other peoples' families and helping raise other women's children. This award-winning film screened nationally in 2005 on the PBS series, *Independent Lens*.

With the release of MAID IN AMERICA, I had a chance to travel across the country doing screenings and presentations revolving around the issues of immigration and globalization of motherhood. It was during this time, while traveling along the border, that I learned first-hand about unaccompanied minors crossing from Mexico into the U.S. I believe this is one of our countries greatest human rights issue, as each year hundreds of lives are lost by men, women and children trying to create a life with greater opportunities. I decided to pick-up where MAID IN AMERICA left off and tell the stories of the children left behind. And so, CHILDREN IN NO MAN'S LAND was born.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### Border Timeline

**1848**, Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo establishes the border between Mexico and the U.S.

**1853**, Gadsden Purchase is signed in Mexico City by the US Minister to Mexico (James Gadsden) and General Antonio Lopez de Santa Ana, President of Mexico. The treaty gives the US claim to approximately 29,000 square miles of land in what is now southern New Mexico and Arizona.

**1918 to 1933**, prohibition happens in the US. There is a great increase in the population along the border, related to the trafficking of illegal goods.

**1917 to 1919**, WW1 causes an increase in Mexican immigration to the US to make up for the lack of an available labor force.

**1933 to 1940**, the economy enters the Great Depression. The first economic development programs are created in the borderlands, based on industrialization models and promotion of greater interdependence between the US and Mexico. The high unemployment rate in the US eliminates the necessity for Mexican labor and as a result, there are massive deportations during this era.

**1948 to 1949**, programs to expand agricultural programs with irrigation increase. These are primarily located in the northern part of Mexico, in the states of Sinaloa, Tamaulipas, Baja California and

Chihuahua. In the U.S., extensive agricultural development begins in Southern California. Both trends stimulate the economic growth and the population in the borderlands.

**1942** the braceros program is negotiated and implemented by the U.S. and Mexico. The government of the U.S. acknowledged the need for Mexican labor, particularly in agriculture. The program allows for temporary legal migration and continues after the war because large cultivators and growing agribusiness. The braceros program is suspended in 1964 due to technological advances in the agricultural sector and the growing power and presence of the United Farm Workers movement fighting for rights, credibility and power.

**1961** the Mexican government creates the National Border Program (PRONAF, Programa Nacional Fronterizo) in order to stimulate the economy via commercial and industrial development. However, unemployment continues to rise, especially with the repatriation of the braceros in 1964. The PRONAF program fails.

**1965**, the Mexican government creates the Program for the Industrialization of the Border (PIF, Programa de Industrialization Fronteriza) to try again to promote industrialization and increase employment. The birth of the maquiladora is a result of the program. Along the border in designated free trade zones foreign businesses allowed land ownership with an exemption from tariffs, taxes, and considerable freedom from environmental restrictions. Employment increases as a result and the population also expands. Simultaneously, on the US side of

the border the population in the Southwest grows as people migrate to the sunbelt.

**1986**, the US implements the Immigration Reform and Control Act aimed at restricting illegal immigration. It imposes sanctions on employers of undocumented immigrants and legalizes more than 3 million undocumented immigrants living in the US through a general amnesty program. 2.3 million of those legalized are Mexican citizens.

**1994**, NAFTA becomes law in Mexico, the US and Canada. The Zapatistas start their extended uprising on the same date, which is no coincidence. The Mexican government agrees to continue phasing out subsidies for subsistence farming. Mexican researchers estimate that these changes have forced as many as two million Mexican subsistence farmers to leave their homes because they can no longer make a living.

**2004**, President Vicente Fox proposes the Plan Puebla Panama to extend the model of foreign investment (maquiladores) to a corridor of seven southern states in Mexico including Campeche, Guerrero, Oaxaca, Puebla, Quintana Roo, Tabasco, Veracruz and Yucatan.) The plan also aims to reach into Central and South America eventually. Fox promotes Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) an additional free trade agreement that will include the entire hemisphere, except for Cuba.

**2005**, the “secure border initiative” calls for the building of 700 miles of fence along the U.S./Mexico border. Numerous studies show that the fence will not significantly reduce the flow of undocumented immigrants. The fence will cost \$3 to \$9 million per mile.

### Today:

Self-appointed vigilante groups have taken to patrolling the U.S. side of the border. In the name of protecting private property and American sovereignty some rogue citizens have rounded-up men, women and children, and in some unfortunate situations have taken to shooting and harming these migrants.

Applications for permanent residence (green cards) for people with family members in the U.S. can take years—and sometimes decades—to even be considered. In 2007, the cost of obtaining residency went up 80 percent. The fees keep many low-income, working, and moderate-income immigrants from obtaining residency.

Immigrant households and businesses pay approximately \$300 billion in federal, state, and local taxes: \$165 billion in federal income taxes, \$85 billion in state and local income taxes, and \$50 billion in business taxes. Undocumented immigrants contribute an estimated \$400-\$460 billion to the U.S. gross domestic product and \$250-\$290 billion to U.S. personal consumption spending.



### THINKING MORE DEEPLY:

1. Before watching the film were you aware of the number of children crossing the border on their own?
2. What did you think about the experience of the children in the detention center? What do the children have in common?
3. What does the U.S. gain by deporting these children?
4. What additional dangers do children face while crossing the border?
4. How do these children's stories compare with the youth in your community or to your own adolescence?
5. Does your family have a migration story? Why did you (and/or your family) migrate and how? How are the stories in the film similar or different to your story?
6. What steps need to be taken to correct this situation? How can you be involved?



## SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTION

1. Join the efforts being made by humanitarian-aid organization along the border and in your community. A list of organizations supporting CHILDREN IN NO MAN'S LAND is included in the resource section of this guide.
2. Organize a group to learn more about child immigration issues. Consider screening this film or organizing a book club.
3. Research immigrant services available in your community. Find out what new immigrants need and how you can help them integrate into their new community.
4. Consider volunteering with or financially supporting one of the border organizations, such as Migrant Resource Center, that works at the border providing food, water, and medication to those in need at the border.
5. Consider volunteering with or financially supporting one of the organizations working to make legislative change, and identifying those who die while crossing the border, such as Coalicion de Derechos Humanos in Tucson, AZ.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### ACLU of New Mexico - Border Rights Project

<http://aclu-nm.org/>

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of New Mexico Foundation is a 501(c)3, non-profit organization dedicated to protecting the rights of all New Mexicans under the Constitution of the United States.

The Border Rights Project engages in outreach and education to communities throughout the borderlands and beyond on issues related to immigrant rights and rights at the border. Utilizing Know Your Rights presentations and trainings as the catalyst, the ACLU Border Rights Project walks with immigrant communities and immigrant serving organizations in the struggle to defend civil and human rights in the face of harsh border enforcement and immigration policies, and advocates for just, fair, and humane policy change.

### American Friends Service Committee - US/Mexico Border Program

<http://www.afsc.org/sandiego/>

The AFSC's US/Mexico Border Program began in 1977 to address economic imbalances between the U.S. and Mexico and to study the phenomenon of human migration. The San Diego Area Office also focuses on the defense of migrants' human and civil rights, farm worker labor rights, and monitors policies and practices of local and federal immigration agencies. In addition, the programs work with migrant families to inform and facilitate an understanding of the impact of immigration law, enforcement of these laws, and the role of militarism on families, communities, and society in general.

### BorderLinks

[www.borderlinks.org](http://www.borderlinks.org)

BorderLinks is an international leader in experiential education that raises awareness and inspires action around global political economics.

BorderLinks grew out of the Sanctuary Movement in the 1980's when faith communities, universities, and other organizations rallied to advocate on behalf of thousands of refugees fleeing persecution in Central America. Today, BorderLinks' educational programs focus on issues of immigration, community formation, development, and social justice in the borderlands between Mexico, the U.S and beyond. As a bi-national organization, BorderLinks brings people together to build bridges of solidarity across North and Latin American borders and promote intercultural understanding and respect.

### Coalición de Derechos Humanos ("The Human Rights Coalition")

<http://www.derechoshumanosaz.net/>

Coalición de Derechos Humanos ("The Human Rights Coalition") is a grassroots organization which promotes respect for human/civil rights and fights the militarization of the Southern Border region, discrimination, and human rights

abuses by federal, state, and local law enforcement officials affecting U.S. and non-U.S. citizens alike. Organization goals include: Strengthening the capacity of the border & urban communities to exercise their rights and participate in public policy decisions. Increasing public awareness of the magnitude of human rights abuses, deaths and assaults at the border resulting from U.S. policy. Seeking changes in government policies that result in human suffering because of the militarization of the U.S. border region.

### Consulate of Mexico

<http://mexico.usembassy.gov/eng/main.html>

Consulates of Mexico have the mission of defending the rights and interest of Mexicans living abroad. As a part of our duties, consular posts implement different programs with the aim of helping and assisting Mexican citizens, giving legal advice and particularly, safeguarding the interest of minors and other vulnerable people.



### Doña Ana County Colonias Development Council

<http://www.colonias.org/>

The Doña Ana County Colonias Development Council works for justice – social, economic and environmental – in the colonia communities of southern New Mexico. The CDC began in the late 1980s as a project of the Catholic Diocese of Las Cruces, New Mexico, and became an independent nonprofit in 1994. Their work is rooted in two primary sources: 1) the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, and 2)

Catholic Social Teachings, which call for the solidarity of all people for the common good.

### Frontera de Cristo

<http://www.fronteradecristo.org/>

Frontera de Cristo is a Presbyterian Bilingual Border Ministry centered in Agua Prieta, Sonora and Douglas, Arizona with six areas of ministry: church development, health ministry, family ministry, New Hope Community Center, mission education, and the Just Trade Center. The ministry is active in providing pastoral care for folks who have or are in the process of migrating, providing humanitarian aid through partnerships with the Migrant Resource Center and Agua Para La Vida, addressing root causes of migration through the Just Trade Center, advocating for comprehensive immigration reform, and building relationships and understanding between folks on both sides of the border.

### Fuerza Unida

<http://www.lafuerzaunida.org/>

Fuerza Unida's mission is to empower women workers and their families to achieve social, economic and environmental justice through education, organizing and advocacy. The Fuerza Unida vision is for workers and their families to actively participate in society by voicing their opinions and concerns while keeping their cultural traditions and values.

### Lideres Campesinas

<http://www.liderescampesinas.org/index.php>

Líderes Campesinas (formally known as Organización en California de Líderes Campesinas) is the only statewide women farmworker's organization in the country. With historical roots stemming back to a 1988 Coachella Valley organization called Mujeres Mexicanas, Líderes Campesinas gained nonprofit status in 1997. With headquarters in Pomona, California, the group has more than five hundred members who are organized through twelve local committees throughout the state.



### National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (NNIRR)

<http://www.nnirr.org/>

The National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights works to defend and expand the rights of all immigrants and refugees, regardless of immigration status. As part of a global movement for social and economic justice, we are committed to human rights as essential to securing healthy, safe and peaceful lives for all.

### No More Deaths / No Mas Muertes

<http://www.nomoredeaths.org/>

No More Deaths is an organization whose mission is to end death and suffering on the U.S./Mexico border through civil initiative: the conviction that people of conscience must work openly and in community to uphold fundamental human rights. Our work embraces the Faith-Based Principles for Immigration Reform.

### Samaritans

[www.samaritanpatrol.org](http://www.samaritanpatrol.org)

Samaritans (formerly Samaritan Patrol) are people of faith and conscience who are responding directly, practically and passionately to the crisis at the US/Mexico border. We are a diverse group of volunteers that are united in our desire to relieve suffering among our brothers and sisters and to honor human dignity. Prompted by the mounting deaths among border crossers, we came together in July 2002 to provide emergency medical assistance, food and water to people crossing the Sonoran Desert.

## Worth Watching Films

### **Maid in America by Anayansi Prado**

<http://impactofilms.com/maidinamerica.html>

Three years in the making, MAID IN AMERICA is a documentary that takes an intimate and emotional look at the lives of three Latin American immigrant women in Los Angeles who've left their own families behind to earn a living cleaning other people's homes and caring for other people's children.

### **Letters from the Other Side by Heather Courtney**

<http://www.sidestreetfilms.com/>

The film tells the story of four women in Mexico whose husbands or sons have left for the United States. Filmmaker, Heather Courtney, engages in many acts of border crossings; she shows how migration has impacted both those in Mexico and those in the US. Through video "letters" carried across the U.S.-Mexico border we learn of gender relations in a post-NAFTA context.

### **The Workers/Los Trabajadores by Heather Courtney**

<http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/theworkers/>

LOS TRABAJADORES follows an eventful year in the lives of Ramón and Juan, centering on the day labor site where they wait for work. When the site moves into a residential neighborhood, the workers find themselves facing opposition,

misunderstanding and racism as they try to organize and earn the trust of the local community. Through experiences that range from political protests to bitter arguments to nostalgic sing-alongs, the men strive to overcome differences, share dreams and connect with one another and local residents alike.

### **The New Americans**

<http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/newamericans/index.html>

What does the "American dream" look like through the eyes of today's immigrants and refugees? From Nigeria, India, the Dominican Republic, Mexico and the Israeli-occupied West Bank, they come with different dreams: to achieve athletic glory or high-tech riches, to escape poverty and persecution, to provide for their families. This seven-hour three-part series follows these newcomers from each of their homelands through their first tumultuous years in America.

### **The City/La Ciudad by David Riker**

<http://www.pbs.org/itvs/thecity/>

THE CITY (LA CIUDAD) tells stories of loss, love, frustration, and hope as four people recently arrived in a large city struggle to build their lives, their communities and their dreams. Filmmaker David Riker's sensitive portrayals urge us to take a closer look at today's immigrants, who are not so different from many of our ancestors when they first arrived from a foreign land.

## SUGGESTED READING

*Dead in Their Tracks: Crossing America's Desert Borderlands*  
by John Annerino

*Coyotes: A Journey Through the Secret World of America's Illegal Aliens*  
by Ted Conover

*Hard Line: Life and Death on the U.S.-Mexico Border*  
by Ken Ellingwood.

*Operation Gatekeeper: The Rise of the "Illegal Alien" and the Making of the U.S.-Mexico Boundary*  
by Joseph Nevins

*The Devil's Highway*  
by Luis Alberto Urrea

*Antonio's Gun and Delfino's Dream*  
by Sam Quinones

*Lives on the Line: Dispatches from the U.S.-Mexico Border*  
by Miriam Davidson

*Enrique's Journey: The Story of a Boy's Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite with his Mother*  
by Sonia Nazario.

*Crossing Over: A Mexican Family on the Migrant Trail*  
by Ruben Martinez.

*Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America*  
by Juan Gonzalez

*Ex Mex: From Migrants to Immigrants*  
by Jorge G. Castañeda

**To Learn More about CHILDREN IN NO MAN'S LAND visit:**

<http://impactofilms.com/children/index.html>

**To buy a DVD copy of CHILDREN IN NO MAN'S LAND go to:**

<http://www.newday.com/>

Information in this guide collected by Anayansi Prado, Anna Lee, Desiree Gutierrez, and Pancho Arguelles.

Historical Reference Sources Include:

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