

Six Mexican immigrants killed by train in Texas

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Another tragedy has befallen migrant workers crossing the US border from Mexico. On Monday morning, six Mexican immigrants were struck by a freight train and killed near Norias, Texas. The six had fallen asleep between the railroad tracks they had been following for miles through the harsh brush land in hopes of avoiding poisonous snakes that infest the range.

At around 3:15 a.m. a crew of a Union Pacific train spotted in their headlights what appeared to be debris on the track. When the crew sounded the horn the migrants sat up but were unable to move out of the way in the split second before the train hit them. The authorities speculated that the migrants may have been too exhausted to move, having walked 60 miles from the Mexican border.

The victims' bodies were so horribly disfigured that authorities could not identify them. All that remained were body parts, crushed cans of beans and packages of tortillas, and other personal belongings along the tracks and scattered in the nearby cactus and mesquite trees. Officials did find one identification card, which indicated that one of the immigrants was from the central Mexican state of Zacatecas, more than 500 miles away.

US authorities and representatives of the railroad company responded to this tragedy with callousness and accusations that the immigrants were responsible for their own deaths. A spokesman from Union Pacific commented, 'It is an unfortunate myth that sleeping between the railroad tracks is protection against snakes. Unfortunately snakes do get over the railroad tracks, and so do trains.'

But the migrant workers did not have the luxury of putting safety first. If they manage to enter the country, Mexican immigrants are pursued like hunted animals

by the US Border Patrol. If caught they face violence, detention and deportation back to desperate poverty in Mexico. Border Patrol agents were reportedly close enough to the group of six Mexicans Monday morning that they heard the train strike them.

The accident brought the death toll of suspected 'illegal' immigrants in Kennedy County, Texas to 16 this year alone. This summer nine Mexicans died in the searing heat as they crossed the area, which includes the world's largest privately held ranch, the 825,000-acre King Ranch south of Corpus Christi, where 50,000 cattle graze among cotton, grain, scrub brush and oil derricks.

While the report of these deaths appeared in US newspapers and electronic media because of the particularly gruesome nature of the incident, most of the hundreds of immigrants who die crossing the border each year hardly rate a mention. At least 150 Mexican immigrants die each year in the attempt, many drowning in the Rio Grande river which marks much of the 2,000-mile border. Many others are not counted because their bodies are never recovered.

The death toll has increased since 1993 when the Clinton administration ordered the Immigration and Naturalization Service to begin a clampdown along the border at heavily populated areas where immigrants could enter and blend in with little detection. This has forced immigrants to use riskier routes to elude capture. At least 320 Mexicans have died trying to cross deserts, mountains and other treacherous areas in the last three years.

In September 1993 Operation Hold the Line began in the El Paso, Texas-Ciudad Juarez, Mexico sector. In October 1994 Operation Gatekeeper began in the San Diego-Tijuana sector. And in August 1997 Operation Rio Grande began in the Brownsville-Matamoros

sector. The INS has increased border patrol agents to 7,700 from 3,400. Federal officials are expected to deploy thousands of new agents as well as US military troops to stop alleged drug smuggling, at the border over the next five years. The agents have been equipped with stadium lighting, infrared scopes and motion sensors buried in trails to hunt their prey.

The brutality and racism of the Border Patrol is well documented. In the week ending October 3, US Border Patrol agents opened fire on immigrants crossing the California-Mexico border on four separate occasions. Two Mexicans were fatally shot for allegedly throwing rocks at agents and a third was seriously wounded.

See Also:

Death on the US-Mexico border
[20 August 1998]



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