

boom—a loud deep sound with much resonance

. . . as of a distant cannon or

an earthquake

a rapid advance in prices

or a sudden bound of activity in any business

truth and the consequences that follow from it, as when

one “lowers the boom”

the effective launching of anything upon public attention

an impetus given to any movement or enterprise

a long beam from which a microphone is suspended

to capture conversations in a crowd

a spar run out to extend a ship’s sail

a pole set up to mark the course

of the deep water

the cry of the bittern

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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

West of the Rio Grande, along the edge of the Great Southwest, runs a US-Mexico border that was once a mere line in the sand. An international survey team mapped it in the early 1850s to separate the Republic of Mexico from its former northern territories, which had been ceded to the United States with the treaty ending the recent war.

For many years, this border was anything but a major thoroughfare for immigrants and it did not attract a great deal of official attention. But after 1882, the United States began monitoring the border to turn back incursions by newly banned Chinese workers (many of whom sought to enter the United States from Mexico to avoid detection). Only in 1910, with the Mexican Revolution, did migration from Mexico really pick up. Since then, the old line in the sand has been at different times reinforced with various combinations of mounted patrols, jeep patrols, armed trackers, vigilantes, fences, aerial surveillance, and high-tech motion sensors.

None of these have been sufficient to stem the wave of humanity that has washed in an uneven but persistent tide north. One White House after another has moved enforcement ever deeper into the heartland, ordering harsher workplace crackdowns, these days through the Department of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, better known as ICE. Undocumented workers have been swept into detention and across the border, only to struggle back to the line and begin the cycle again. Not even the very real threat of kidnap gangs on the Mexican side of the boundary is enough to put them off.

The border and its meanings run through this issue of *Boom*, just as they pervade California itself. Today, the border is everywhere among us, conditioning and remaking our friendships, families, schools, universities, workplaces, love affairs, and, of course, our politics. How it got there and what we should do about it are questions that animate our authors in this issue of *Boom*.

Capital no longer flows; it races in electronic bursts, and perhaps, as Ricardo Domínguez suggests, we should embrace the free flow of labor—of humanity—and extend civil rights to migrants. After all, as Al Hurtado points out, American California was created by American “illegals” in the Republic of Mexico. And who is to say that our nation is not stronger for housing people with binational loyalties? As Matt Garcia reveals, even migrant workers who arrived on temporary visas made genuine, heartfelt contributions to the United States as well as to Mexico. Underscoring the need to reexamine American borders, Kelly Lytle Hernández illuminates the disturbing historical ties between slavery and border enforcement, and their discomfiting legacies for modern Californians.

Americans today inhabit a curious kind of borderland, and in some ways the border has become a more noticeable and persistent force in their lives. As ICE patrols the cornfields, construction sites, and meat-packing plants of middle America, the nation’s boundary seems to move ever more away from its edge and into its center. Perhaps California, the state on the nation’s Pacific edge, where the heartland and the periphery never seem far apart, is an ideal place to contemplate that strange turn.

Louis Warren