



The longest border in the world where the richest nation on earth coexists with a very poor neighbor is that between the United States and Mexico. A dividing line. As President Porfirio Díaz stated at the turn of the century, "Poor Mexico, so far from God, and so close to the United States". Nearly 20% of the population of contemporary Mexico now resides in the United States.

When in 1994 Californians voted to enact Proposition 187, which among other niceties intended to deprive undocumented immigrants of their rights to basic health and education benefits, none of the politicians ever imagined the backlash that such a measure would provoke. Mexicans who had never bothered before to pursue their legal rights as US citizens started to apply in droves for citizenship papers, and in the process altered the political landscape of California forever. These new voters have become a political force to be reckoned with, and also form part of the THE NEW AMERICANS.

But when such events are solely described in statistical numbers, the process becomes dehumanised and individual experience loses meaning. To bring the process into perspective, writer Ruben Martinez (US citizen of Mexican/Salvadoran origin) and photographer Joseph Rodríguez (US citizen of Puertorican origin) along with the photographer/editor of ZoneZero, Pedro Meyer (Mexican citizen) came together to bring you not a deluge of statistics but the human side of the THE NEW AMERICANS and with it a very contemporary debate. These issues are not that different to what is going on in other parts of the world today.

This journal of travels by Martinez and Rodríguez is not without a long list of famous precedents. Robert Franks' THE AMERICANS is without question a strong reference that has to be reckoned with--a seminal body of work nearly a half-century ago. Also in this rich tradition of documentary work Walker Evans's and James Agee's book "Let us now Praise Famous Men," done during the Great Depression, or Kerouac's "On the Road".

These works turned out to be very influential over time, and classics in their own right. Now, THE NEW AMERICANS brings a different country before your eyes, and the stories are those whose voices have never been heard before. However on this occasion, we are at a new crossroads not only with regard to these voices but also with a technological frontier. The internet gives us the opportunity for you the reader or viewer (as you choose to be called) to also have a voice and be involved in this project in ways that are different to anything that has been done before. To this end we are preparing CHAT rooms, and FORUMS (see enclosed schedule) which will allow us to dialogue "live" with the authors--and their subjects--as they embark on the next leg of their journey. What you have here today is only the initial portion of this project, something that will allow you to start getting involved.

We are inviting all those individuals, schools and Universities that are interested to register with us, to form part of the CHAT rooms that will be hooked up with the authors every other day, once they start to travel again. We have limited seating available in these CHAT rooms, therefore your early registration will assure you a space. We encourage you to write to us.

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