

The Origins of Border Crossing and Border Policing

Excluding the Downtrodden: European Border Crossers, and the Immigration Act of 1882

The year was 1882. The land borders of the United States had never been policed, but this was about to change. That year saw the passage of the federal government's first comprehensive Immigration Act, and marked the beginning of an over forty-year effort by the federal government to create a framework for who should, and should not, be allowed into the country. The Immigration Act of 1882 began this process by forbidding the immigration of "any convict, lunatic, idiot, or any person unable to take care of himself or herself." Although the language of "any person unable to take care" of themselves was vague and open to interpretation, it was understood to refer to impoverished people, or "paupers." What was less clear was whether it included people with chronic illnesses, or even the elderly. Further immigration acts would be more specific.

The point of these first restrictions was to prevent the immigration of anyone who might become a "public charge," meaning anyone who was judged incapable of providing for themselves, and would instead rely on community charity, government assistance... or institutionalization in prisons or asylums. The context of America's first Immigration Act was an economic depression that rocked the country from 1872 to 1878, followed by the mass displacement of millions of Europeans starting in the early 1880s, caused by the second industrial revolution. Economic anxieties combined with the sheer volume of new immigrants created political pressures to be selective in who was let into the U.S., and who was not. Ironically, the Immigration Act of 1882, targeting impoverished people and people with mental and physical disabilities, was passed just a few years before the Statue of Liberty was erected... and just one year before poet Emma Lazarus composed these familiar words: "Give me your tired, your poor/Your huddled masses."

Many immigrants immediately wondered if the Immigration Act would apply to them or the family members they travelled with. Who exactly would immigration officials judge to be an "idiot" or a "lunatic"? If younger immigrants were travelling with older parents, would those parents be deemed a "person unable to take care of himself or herself" because of their age? If immigrants arrived with few possessions, or were sick and disheveled after an arduous overseas journey, would they be judged as sickly and impoverished and potentially turned around?

Because of these fears, many European immigrants – mostly English and Irish at the time – began avoiding America's seaports, and instead sailing for ports in southern Canada. From there, they simply crossed the border into Maine, Vermont or New York. Because the vast majority of immigrants came from overseas and landed in America's seaports at the time, the language of the Immigration Act of 1882 referred

to people who were “not a citizen of the United States who shall come by steam or sail vessel.” What this meant was that, technically and legally, immigrants who would have been excluded at America’s seaports could in fact cross legally over America’s land borders... for they were not entering the U.S. “by steam or sail vessel.” Furthermore, the Immigration Act of 1882 only called for the deportation of people with criminal records back to where they came from. All other excluded immigrants were allowed to sail to wherever they wished as long as it wasn’t the U.S. This led many immigrants who were turned away at America’s seaports to simply sail to Canada, and then cross into the United States.

Within a matter of months, articles were being published about European immigrants taking advantage of this loophole. For example, 11 months after the passage of the Immigration Act of 1882, the *New York Times* reported that 28 “helpless and starving” recent immigrants from Ireland had been found in the streets of Buffalo, New York, having just crossed from Canada. These immigrants, according to the article, were “destitute, having neither money nor friends, and . . . too feeble, by reason of age or infirmity, to support themselves.” These were exactly the sort of immigrants that America’s first comprehensive Immigration Act had sought to exclude.

Pressure mounted throughout the 1880s to revise the Immigration Act of 1882, so that it included America’s land borders. The Immigration Act of 1891 did exactly this: not only did it forbid excluded immigrants from crossing America’s land borders, it also called for the deportation of all excludable immigrants when they arrived at America’s seaports. This meant that not only criminals would be shipped back to the ports from which they came, but that all excluded immigrants would, depriving them of the opportunity to book passages north to Canada.

The Immigration Act of 1891 also added new categories of excludable immigrants, including “those convicted of a crime involving moral turpitude,” “people with loathsome or contagious diseases,” and polygamists. It also banned people “likely” to become impoverished, rather than just those who already were. This especially impacted women who were travelling alone, given the common assumption that women relied on men for financial support. In reality, immigration officials hardly had the resources to seriously enforce additional restrictions and the inspections they required. European immigrants, however, didn’t know that, and they often decided to play it safe. These further exclusions predictably convinced more Europeans that they should enter the U.S. by secretly crossing the Canadian border, despite the fact that the Immigration Act of 1891 had closed the previous loophole regarding “steam or sail” vessels, and made such crossings illegal.

With that loophole closed, immigration officials were suddenly tasked with policing America’s land borders. Understanding that this would be extremely expensive and enormously difficult, immigration officials at first looked for other alternatives. They reached out to Canadian steamship lines and negotiated a deal in which U.S. immigration authorities would inspect immigrants departing at Canadian ports, but

who were bound for the U.S. The plan was a spectacular failure: departing immigrants simply had to state that their destination was Canada, and there was nothing that U.S. authorities could do. Immigration officials also made deals with Canadian railroads to inspect immigrants headed into the U.S., but immigrants easily avoided such inspections: they simply had to purchase round-trip tickets and claim they were merely visiting; have a non-immigrant purchase a ticket for them; or just take a train to a border town and walk over somewhere out of sight.

By 1898, immigration officials conceded that they had failed to prevent restricted European immigrants from entering the U.S. through Canada's ports and railways. It was only at that point that they began calling for immigration inspection points directly along the Canadian border. By 1901, those border inspection points were in place. A veteran inspector named Robert Watchorn was charged with coordinating and training inspectors; by the summer of 1902 he reported that "not a train or boat or any railroad or regularly chartered boat route enters the United States in this jurisdiction without being inspected." Not a day passed, he wrote, "without one or more alien immigrants being removed from a train or boat and returned to Canada, or deported to Europe." During that year, 4,985 European immigrants were inspected along the Canadian border, and 2,028 were turned around. In the words of historian Patrick Ettinger, "The era of direct border enforcement had begun."

During these same years, landing at Canadian ports also became more difficult: between 1900 and 1902, Canada passed its own restrictive immigration bills, which mirrored those of the U.S. For restricted European immigrants, sailing to Canadian ports was thus no longer an easy option: this led them to turn towards Mexico. Border crossings through Mexico would soon lead to border policing along the southern border as well. And with both land borders policed, restricted immigrants would soon become more sophisticated and ingenious in their methods of crossing. Border policing would in turn evolve to meet that immigrant ingenuity.

Europeans, however, were not the first excluded immigrants seeking to cross into the U.S. via Canada, or Mexico. That would be the Chinese.

America's First Undocumented Immigrants: Chinese Women, Sex Workers, and The Page Act of 1875

Although the Immigration Act of 1882 was the federal government's first *comprehensive* immigration law – laying out broad categories for exclusion which applied to people of all races and nationalities – the government had passed earlier immigration laws targeting a specific ethnic group: the Chinese.

Although states had long passed their own immigration legislation, the very first federal immigration law in U.S. history – meaning the first that could have impacted the borders of the country as a whole, and how they were policed and who could

cross them – was the Page Act of 1875. This act primarily aimed to exclude cheap Chinese labor and Chinese sex workers. White Americans had pushed to exclude Chinese immigrants since the early days of the Gold Rush, demonizing them as an inferior race and arguing that they created unfair competition. Although Chinese immigrants faced mob violence and laws were passed banning them from gold mining, they continued to arrive as a series of wars, rebellions, and natural disasters rocked their homeland. Desperate communities sent their young men abroad despite the prejudices they would face, hoping that they could send money home. Excluded from most forms of work, Chinese men took on the hardest, most low-paying and backbreaking forms of labor – including draining the swamps, digging the ditches, and building the irrigation channels and levees that allowed California to develop some of the richest farmland in the nation. In addition to laying the foundation for a multi billion-dollar agricultural industry, Chinese laborers built the railroads of the American West, which turned the region into an economic powerhouse.

The Page Act was aimed at excluding this “unfair labor competition.” It failed... partly because the act only forbid the importation of Chinese workers against their will. This represented a belief in Congress that many Chinese workers were part of an Asian slave trade, which had indeed been developed by Europeans after the abolition of the African slave trade in their empires. Although an Asian slave trade was taking place just below America’s borders in Cuba and the Caribbean Sea – something that had generated enormous media coverage during the buildup to the Civil War – the Chinese who ventured to America were not a part of it. Because they came voluntarily, the Page Act did not exclude them.

The exclusion of Chinese sex workers had a more painful impact... for following the Page Act, Chinese women travelling to the U.S. were assumed to be sex workers unless they could prove otherwise. This was often impossible, given that immigration officers had anti-Chinese sentiments and treated wedding certificates, photos, and other evidence of family ties as fraudulent. Wives and daughters who had risked everything to make an excruciating journey overseas were thus often shipped right back to China. The Page Act was portrayed as a bill cracking down on prostitution, which was indeed widespread in the almost entirely male Chinese immigrant community. However, California was a heavily male state populated by miners and sailors, and prostitution was widespread in general. By specifically targeting Asian sex workers for exclusion, and then using that as a means to exclude Asian women, the Page Act aimed, in part, to prevent the birth of Chinese babies on American soil, who could potentially claim citizenship rights.

Because the Page Act failed to exclude Chinese workers (due to the fact that they came voluntarily), it did not create an incentive for them to avoid America’s ports and to cross America’s land borders as undocumented immigrants. Although it did create such an incentive for Chinese sex workers and for Chinese women, there are no records of such undocumented crossings. Chinese sex workers – and the women who were accused of sex work – were, however, America’s first excluded

immigrants, and those who found ways into the country would have been the first undocumented immigrants. If any of these women crossed into the U.S. over the Canadian or Mexican borders, however, their crossings remain invisible to history. The Page Act thus did not contribute to the history of border crossing and border policing.

America's First Undocumented Border Crossers: The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882

On May 6, 1882, Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act. By targeting all Chinese workers for exclusion – whether they engaged in skilled or unskilled labor – it succeeded where the Page Act had failed. The Chinese Exclusion Act continued to allow Chinese merchants, diplomats, students, teachers, and travellers to visit the United States. It also allowed Chinese who were residents before 1882 to remain, and to leave the United States and return... as long as they had certificates showing proof of residence.

Because there were so many exceptions to Chinese exclusion, the act created a market for forged documents – falsified papers proving residency, student status, etc. Many Chinese residents who were barred from reentry also successfully appealed their cases in court. Because most Chinese who would have been excluded either turned to the law or sought forged documentation, the Chinese Exclusion Act – like the Page Act – did not create the pressure and the incentive for large numbers of Chinese workers to avoid America's ports and to instead cross the land borders. There was a major exception, however: Canada had been using Chinese labor as well, and Chinese railroad workers who were residents of the U.S. had travelled to Canada to help build the railroads there. Because they had left the U.S. before the Chinese Exclusion Act was passed, they did not carry official certification of residency with them, and therefore could not legally return to their own homes. Although plenty of other Chinese workers in Canada also had a strong incentive to illegally cross the border into the U.S. to pursue work, that incentive would have been especially strong for literal U.S. residents who simply didn't have their papers. Thus, whereas Chinese women and sex workers were the first undocumented immigrants to enter through America's ports, it is likely that Chinese workers in Canada – and especially those simply attempting to return home – were America's first undocumented immigrants to cross over America's land borders.

That said, the Immigration Act of 1882 was pushing excluded European immigrants over the Canadian border from the east at precisely the same time. The Immigration Act of 1882 was passed on August 3, a mere three months after the Chinese Exclusion Act. Although passed three months later, because Europeans were being immediately turned around at America's ports, they quickly sailed to Canada. This wasn't the case with the Chinese, who sought either fraudulent documentation or to argue their cases in court as their means of entry. This fact, combined with the far

greater immigration numbers of Europeans, means that the Immigration Act of 1882 pushed more Europeans across the border than the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 pushed Chinese.

The European border crossers, however, were not technically illegal: once again, the Immigration Act had assumed that immigrants would arrive at America's seaports and thus only forbid their entry through those seaports. They would not technically be crossing illegally until the Immigration Act's revision in 1891. Another major difference between the two groups of border crossers was race: even after 1891, the Whiteness of undocumented European immigrants allowed them to cross borders and live in American society with far less suspicion. Anyone who appeared to be Asian, on the other hand, was immediately suspected of crossing into the country, or being in the country, illegally. Undocumented Chinese immigrants had to take far more precautions when crossing the border. They also had to take on far greater expenses... and risks.

Undocumented Border Crossings Increase: The Scott Act of 1888

In 1888, Chinese exclusion was further strengthened by the Scott Act, which forbid Chinese workers in the United States from returning if they left... even if they had acquired official certificates of residency from immigration officials. 24,443 Chinese residents had travelled abroad after acquiring these documents at the time of the Scott Act's passage. The sudden voiding of these official certificates meant they could not return home; it also meant that forgeries which might have previously been accepted as proof of residency would no longer be effective forms of entry. This predictably led to a spike in undocumented Chinese migration... and because immigrating through the ports was now more difficult, much of that migration began to flow over America's land borders for the first time.

Because Chinese could still enter through Canadian ports, and because Chinese communities existed on both sides of the U.S.-Canadian border, entering through Canada made the most sense to many Chinese. After arriving in Canada, they found supportive Chinese communities who knew the geography of the borderlands well, and who could guide them to Chinese communities on the American side. Indigenous peoples were also sympathetic, and sometimes served as guides. Indeed, just as Chinese border crossers were guided into Chinese communities, they were also guided onto Native American reservations... where Chinese had settled, and on a few occasions even married into indigenous tribes.

Although some Chinese crossed the border by trekking through the heavily wooded and unpopulated Cascade Mountains in small groups, most chose to venture through the hundreds of small channels and islands of Puget Sound. Puget Sound's geography led it to be known as a "smuggler's paradise," through which all manner

of illicit goods – and especially opium – were brought into the U.S. Men in the business of smuggling saw an opportunity to make money off the Chinese Exclusion Act, and would have seen even more of an opportunity in the Scott Act. Crossing the border with them was dangerous, however. Smugglers along the Canadian border were primarily White American or Canadian men who brought Chinese across the border for profit, not some sense of solidarity. To avoid being caught in an illegal act, they were known to kill or throw their “human cargo” overboard. Undocumented immigration was extremely dangerous from its very beginning.

Although these crossings had been occurring since the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, it was only after the Scott Act of 1888 that they received substantial congressional attention. Border officials were soon reporting regularly on the smuggling of undocumented Chinese immigrants across the Canadian border. In 1890, one border official testifying before a congressional committee estimated that an average of 2500 undocumented Chinese were crossing the Canadian border annually. This was a miniscule number compared to the 455,302 immigrants who entered the country legally that year, but anti-Chinese racism made even small numbers loom large.

Although border officials familiarized themselves with the workings of smuggling operations, they felt that the odds were stacked against them. The length of the border and the difficulty of its geography made it impossible to adequately police. The fact that Chinese border crossers could simply blend into Chinese communities soon after their crossings made their capture almost impossible unless they were apprehended immediately. And the fact that the Chinese exclusion laws ordered that Chinese be deported to the “country from whence they came” meant that all that border officials could do if they captured Chinese crossing from Canada was send them back to Canada... where they could easily cross again. This was another incentive for Chinese to avoid entering through American ports, where being shipped back to the “country from whence they came” meant returning to China. In the congressional hearings of 1890, border officials urged that the language of the law be changed to allow for deportations to China, even if undocumented Chinese were crossing from Canada or Mexico. During this year, the House and the Senate also urged the President to negotiate with Mexico and Canada to pass their own Chinese exclusion laws, so that Chinese couldn’t simply enter through the ports of those nations and then cross into the U.S.

Although neither Mexico nor Canada agreed to exclude Chinese immigrants, in 1885, Canada had already imposed a \$50 fee on Chinese seeking residency. This infuriated many anti-Chinese Americans, who felt that Canada was making money off of undocumented Chinese immigration into the U.S., given that many of the Chinese who paid the \$50 immediately crossed the border. However, when Canada increased that fee to \$100 in 1901 – roughly \$3000 in today’s money – the cost became prohibitive. The smuggling rings that dealt in undocumented Chinese immigration organized for Chinese to land in Canadian ports, but once the fee

increased, it began to make financial sense to find an alternative route. This became even more true in 1903, when Canada increased the fee to \$500.

Thus by 1901, Chinese were excluded from American ports by law and from Canadian ports by exorbitant fees. Their alternative route was clear... as it had been for the Europeans who were excluded from entering Canadian ports by immigration laws passed between 1900 and 1902. Just as those Europeans had begun sailing for Mexican ports and had then crossed the Mexican border into the U.S., so too would the Chinese... at almost precisely the same time.

Away from the Canadian Border, and Towards the Mexican: A New Century Begins

Given growing anti-Chinese sentiment in Canada, smuggling rings had long predicted that it would become more difficult to smuggle Chinese immigrants across the Canadian border and into the United States. Throughout the 1890s, they had experimented with landing Chinese in small fishing villages along the coast of Mexico, and then guiding the migrants across the border. At around the same time, Chinese were arriving on the eastern Coast of Mexico from Cuba, where 142,000 Chinese had recently been enslaved... a full half of whom had been worked to death. When slavery was abolished in Cuba in 1886, Mexico began recruiting Chinese labor from the island to help build Mexican railroads. When their work was completed in Mexico, many of these Chinese pursued work across the U.S.-Mexico border. Thus, although large numbers of undocumented Chinese immigrants only began crossing over the U.S.-Mexico border once crossing through Canada became too costly in 1901, they were hardly the first Chinese to take that route.

Chinese migration to Mexico escalated for another reason at this time. Mexican President Porfirio Diaz had dreams of industrializing his nation, and he had seen that both Canada and the U.S. had accomplished industrialization using the labor of immigrants. Although U.S. officials pushed for Mexico to pass its own Chinese exclusion laws, Diaz believed that Chinese immigrants could help build Mexico's railroads, just as they had done in the U.S. and in Canada. President Diaz thus signed a treaty with China in 1899, creating direct steamship service between the two countries for the first time in order to bring Chinese labor into Mexico.

As Chinese workers flowed into Mexico, many of them found employment working in mines and building railroads in the sparsely populated U.S.-Mexico borderlands. Chinese communities quickly developed in Mexican border cities. Such communities already existed on the American side of the border, where Chinese labor had also been used in mines and on railroads. By the time that Chinese immigrant smuggling rings began turning away from Canada in 1901, Chinese communities already existed on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border. These

communities facilitated the crossings of undocumented Chinese immigrants, just as they had in Canada.

Thus, a number of factors led the U.S.-Mexico border to emerge as a major space of undocumented border crossing during the opening years of the twentieth century: Mexico began recruiting Chinese labor, much of which soon crossed into the United States. New Canadian laws pushed both Chinese and European immigrants towards Mexico. By 1900, these Europeans were arriving not only from the Northwest, but from Southern and Eastern Europe as well... “new” European immigrants who were racially stigmatized in the U.S. Finally, a rising anti-Japanese movement in the United States began pushing Japanese immigrants towards the Mexican border, and immigrants from current-day Syria, Lebanon, and Turkey were also joining the immigrant flow, fleeing persecution and war. These diverse immigrants all turned to the Mexican border for the same reasons: they all feared exclusion due to racial prejudice, or because of the poverty and physical ailments their home conditions had inflicted upon them. Immigrants from around the world feared exclusion precisely because they *were* the tired, the poor, the huddled masses yearning to breathe free.

With More Border Policing Comes... More Sophisticated Smuggling: The Immigration Act of 1903

The opening years of the twentieth century were also the years in which the U.S.-Mexico border emerged as a major space of border policing. During congressional debates in 1902, immigration officials assured Congress that America’s land borders could be effectively controlled... as long as they were given enough manpower. Their testimonies convinced Congress to increase funding for enforcement along the U.S.-Mexico border. When the Immigration Act of 1903 was passed, it not only added new categories of excluded immigrants – anarchists, epileptics, prostitutes, and anyone associated with the business of prostitution – it also doubled the tax that immigrants paid to enter the country, which effectively doubled the funding for the Bureau of Immigration.

This increased funding was used to expand the number of official entry points along the U.S.-Mexico border – accompanied by new inspection stations and immigration inspectors – from a mere three before the Immigration Act of 1903 to twenty-one by 1909. The funding was also used to create a mounted unit of roughly seventy-five border officers to patrol the stretches between these official entry points on horseback. In the words of historian Patrick Ettinger, “the United States had begun drafting the outlines of a resource-intensive border enforcement policy,” which would lead to the founding of the Border Patrol two decades later. This increased border enforcement escalated the dynamic between border enforcement and border smuggling, in which smuggling became more sophisticated as policing

became more sophisticated; and policing became more sophisticated as smuggling became more sophisticated.

Much of that smuggling originated in immigrant home countries, where organizations developed to guide potentially excluded countrymen and women towards safer lands. Once in Mexico, immigrants from around the world were guided to hotels and saloons where they would receive coaching on how to cross the border into the United States. Chinese smuggling rings dominated this scene: no surprise, given their two decades of experience with exclusion and undocumented entry by this time. Chinese communities on both sides of the border were often the backbone of local undocumented immigrant smuggling efforts, regardless of whether those being smuggled were Chinese, Japanese, European, or Middle Eastern.

By this time, border officials had already developed the strategy of focusing on the main entry points between Mexico and the United States, in order to push undocumented border crossers away from safer routes and towards harsh desert terrain. In the words of one federal official, the goal was to “at least make attempts to cross the border dangerous,” so that fewer immigrants would try to cross. One outcome of this policy was that people desperate to build a life in a safer land began dying in the desert. Another was that as the journey became more dangerous, more immigrants decided that they needed professional smugglers. These smugglers sought to avoid dangerous routes themselves, and instead sought ways to cross into the U.S. within just a few miles of border cities and their inspection points... or even right through them. By studying the practices and routines of the inspection points, border officers, and mounted patrol units, they developed ingenious methods of undocumented entry.

At this time, the vast majority of people crossing the border were Mexicans, who had always crossed freely to participate in work, trade, entertainment, and to visit friends and family. At busy points of entry, immigration inspectors couldn't possibly inspect everyone: they would only stop someone if their appearance or behavior caused the inspector to suspect them of being an excludable immigrant. One of the major signs that someone might be an immigrant in the first place was that they were carrying luggage, but there was a simple way around this problem: because Mexicans crossed the border freely, smugglers simply hired local Mexicans to carry an immigrants luggage across the border for them. Another obvious sign that someone was from a foreign land was if they wore traditional clothing or hairstyles. These had to be abandoned if immigrants wished to blend in.

The ultimate way to blend in, however, was to appear Mexican. Passing as Mexican was a major strategy used by brown-skinned immigrants from around the world. Undocumented border crossers from Greece to the Middle East and especially China simply dressed as Mexican workers to move across the border. In order to blend in, these immigrants would often walk across with a group of local Mexicans who smugglers worked with. These Mexicans would talk to the immigrant as they

walked, and the immigrant might nod or laugh in order to make it appear as if they understood Spanish. Smugglers sometimes took such acts farther by taking advantage of the racial stereotypes of border inspectors, such as the stereotype of the “drunken Mexican.” For example, one tactic to help an undocumented immigrant blend in was to teach them a Mexican song, and then have them stumble across the border with a group of Mexicans who were singing and acting drunk... and who would appear to border inspectors to simply be out for a good time. Complicating matters even further for border officers was the fact that there were a large number of actual Chinese Mexicans living in the borderlands by this time – Chinese who had settled in Mexico, married into Mexican families, spoke fluent Spanish, and dressed in Mexican clothing. Undocumented Chinese immigrants, if caught, could simply claim to be a member of this group... as long as they dressed the part, learned some Spanish, and developed a convincing story of their life in Mexico. Such strategies of racial passing and racial blurring would have been impossible in predominantly-White Canada.

Besides the strategy of racial passing, it was important for all immigrants seeking to cross the border – regardless the color of their skin – not to appear sickly or impoverished. Doctors specializing in how to make people appear healthy set up shop in border towns, and smugglers would sometimes provide immigrants with nice clothing and even “show money,” so that if they were stopped they would appear healthy and financially stable. The clothing and the money were, of course, returned shortly after crossing the border. Besides such appearances, bribery and corruption was widespread along the border, with everyone from train conductors to lawyers and even border inspectors and chiefs of police getting paid by smuggling rings to help undocumented immigrants cross the border. Such corruption was especially common in small border towns, where smuggling was an important and socially accepted part of the economy, and where everyone was connected and often willing to do one another favors. One final method of crossing right under the noses of border inspectors was to tunnel in: when old buildings in border towns were demolished, long tunnels leading under the border were sometimes discovered.

Border enforcement evolved to meet all of these different smuggling strategies... at least somewhat. Because it was easy for locals to do other locals favors in small border towns, it was later decided that border police and border inspectors should be hired from outside of the region in order to crack down on corruption. In order to discover the methods of immigrant smugglers, officers sometimes went undercover, posing as immigrants themselves. In an effort to defeat the “racial passing” technique, border inspectors began inspecting an increasing amount of Mexicans. One of the most effective forms of border enforcement, however, was the cultivation of informants: for the right price or under the right pressure, informants could offer valuable information on when and where undocumented immigrants would be crossing and who was helping them. Finally, in more remote areas, expert trackers were hired by the mounted patrol unit. In the on-going interplay between smuggling and policing, smugglers who chose those more dangerous routes through

remote regions learned to travel over rockier terrain, where the signs of their passage were less visible.

Despite these early attempts at policing, excluded immigrants continued to find their way across the U.S.-Mexico border. Only the violence of the Mexican Revolution, followed by the total closure to European immigration during the First World War, would put an end to these first waves of undocumented border crossings. Those cataclysmic events would also create new waves of immigrants... and new forms of border crossing, and policing.