

Jon Lowenstein has been a professional photographer for more than ten years. He specializes in long-term, in-depth documentary photographic projects which question the status quo. He believes that documentary photographers make a significant contribution to our society by serving as visual witnesses and historians. Most importantly, he loves people and photography. To those who say that photography is irrelevant he asks them to imagine a world without photography.

During the past decade, millions of Mexican and Central American migrants have left their homes and families, faced death on the journey to the United States and lived under the specter of criminality once in this country. Despite these obstacles, these resilient immigrants are transforming American culture and posing fundamental questions of justice, citizenship, and labor to the country. The struggle about how best to define and treat this growing and increasingly influential population is one of the most vital and complex issues of our time.

Jon Lowenstein has been documenting the lives of Latin American migrants since 2000 when he photographed the struggle of day laborers to find work each day on Chicago's Northwest Side. Since then he has traveled throughout the United States and Mexico to document the lives of Latin American men and women who have taken the perilous journey North to the United States in search of the American Dream.

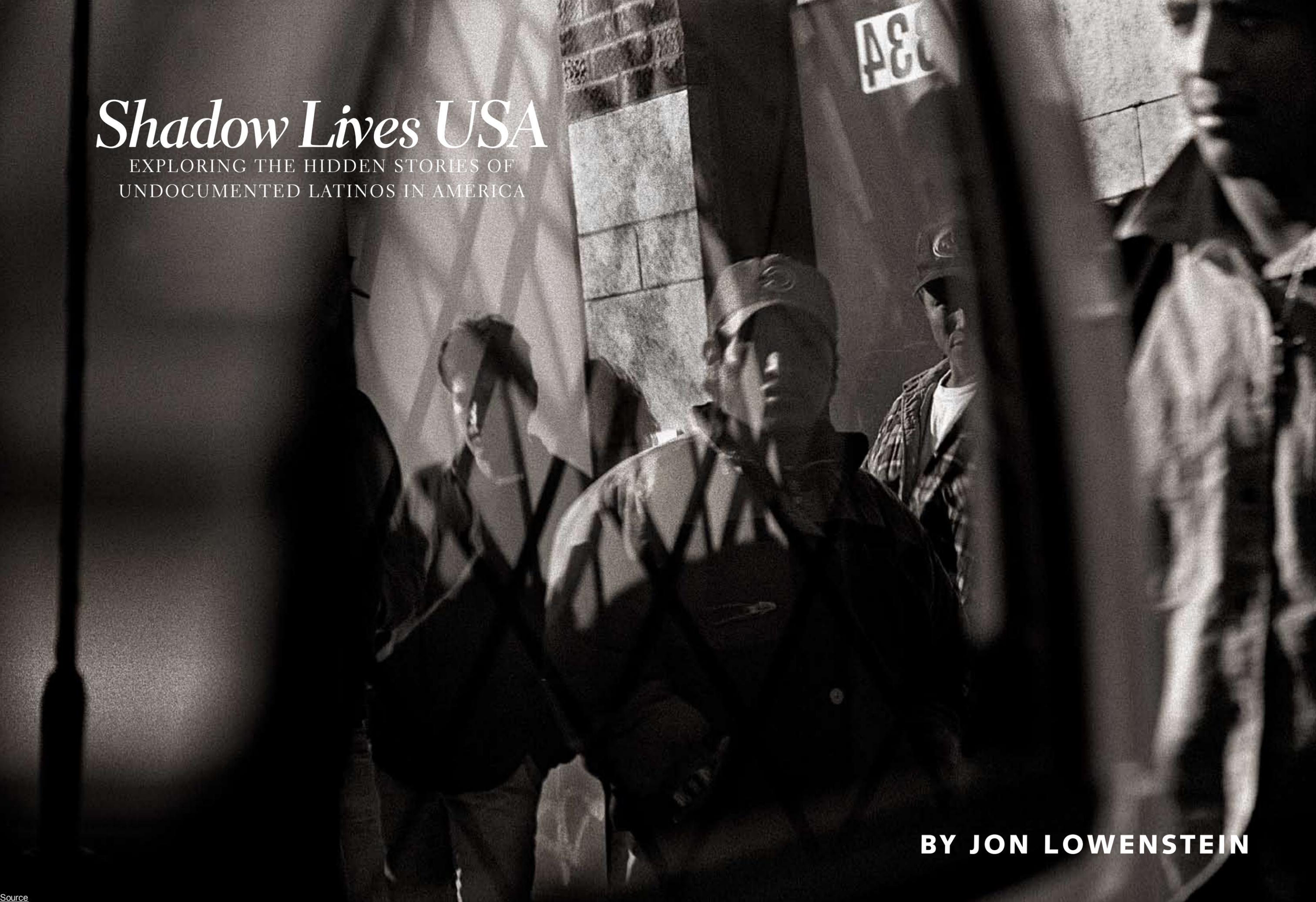
Lowenstein has partnered with the Blue Earth Alliance to create a multi-faceted media project that will serve as an historical document of the issue. In September 2007 he was awarded the prestigious Getty Images Grant for Editorial Photography. Shadow Lives USA adds a humane and nuanced examination to the national debate about the millions of undocumented men and women who are currently living, working and becoming an integral part of the United States.

For more information or to support the project please visit www.shadowlivesusa.org or call (773) 220-0275.

SHADOW LIVES USA



JON LOWENSTEIN



Shadow Lives USA

EXPLORING THE HIDDEN STORIES OF
UNDOCUMENTED LATINOS IN AMERICA

BY JON LOWENSTEIN



PROJECT SYNOPSIS

SHADOW LIVES USA

THE UNITED STATES IS AT A WATERSHED MOMENT.

Our nation's businesses have a seemingly endless need for immigrant labor, contributing mightily to the largest transnational migration in world history that shows no sign of abating. During the past decade, millions of Latin American migrants have risked their lives to journey to the United States in search of the "Sueno Americano," or American Dream.



Far from returning home with the riches they imagine, many migrants end up living permanently in the United States, enduring economic exploitation and the specter of deportation in a nation that seeks their labor but defines them as criminals. The recent failure by the U.S. Senate to pass comprehensive immigration reform ensures that millions of these immigrants will continue to hide in the shadows of American society, prone to abuse and oppression. Already strong across the country before the failure of the Kennedy-McCain proposal, anti-immigrant sentiment has only gained strength since the bill's defeat.

In this polarized environment, individual migrants' stories are a rare but critical element to the formation of a humane national immigration policy. Since 2000, I have traveled throughout the United States and Latin America in an effort to photograph the collective experience of this historic story and to bear witness to a group of people who too often are silenced and ignored by their adopted society. During this time I have witnessed a disturbing xenophobic shift throughout the United States. Right now it's more important than ever to continue to humanize this complex issue.

SHADOW LIVES USA is comprised of an ambitious,

but achievable timetable with six individual photo stories to be completed by January 2009.

1. MILITARIZED BORDER documents life on each side of the U.S./Mexico border to illustrate the increasing physical and psychological separation that has accompanied the unprecedented militaristic build-up during the past decade. A quasi-military zone – complete with thousands of border patrol agents, electronic motion sensors, detention centers and hundreds of miles of fences – has emerged. Due in large part to this build-up, more than 4,000 migrants have perished attempting to cross the US/Mexico border since the mid 90s. Ironically, the build-up has broken the traditional circularity of Mexican immigration forcing many migrants to send for family members and create permanent roots in the United States.

During the past three years I have photographed check points, official border crossings, Border Patrol agents at work and life along both sides of the border. In February, I photographed the Border Patrol Special Response Team (SRT) school and was privy to the intense military-style training used to increase border security.

This story will examine how this increasing militarization affects the psychological and

physical life of residents on both sides of the U.S./Mexico border. As the build up increases and extends into the interior I will also document how this anti-immigrant security policy affects Latino communities within the United States.

2. THE PERILOUS PATH begins with the journey North from Central America and Mexico. In Tenosique, Mexico I witnessed groups of between 10 and 20 Central American men, women and children walked wearily down the tracks to wait to jump top of freight trains to the United States, evoking a modern day version of John Steinbeck's classic novel, *The Grapes of Wrath*. The American Dustbowl threw thousands of Americans onto the road in search of economic survival. Today's economic migrants make the harrowing transnational trek in tennis sneakers and knock-off Tommy Hilfiger jeans. Yet, like their Dustbowl counterparts, these migrants risk everything, and face extortion, robbery and death in their journey to the promised land of the United States.

These people are attempting to escape a growing epicenter of grinding poverty in Central America where Honduras trails only Haiti as the second poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere. The initial component will show the deep emotional ties migrants have to their hometowns

by photographing their native communities in Mexico and Central America. From there I will follow the harrowing journey North. I also plan to photograph migrants in Southern Mexico who have become disabled through train accidents. Many of these people never reach the United States, remaining instead in permanent limbo without a safety net to protect them.

I have already spent significant time documenting part of this journey. In the summer of 2003 I accompanied a group of migrants slipping across the Rio Grande into McAllen, Texas. I have also photographed migrant shelters and indigent burials at the U.S./Mexico border, and I recently photographed Central American migrants as they slipped from Northern Guatemala into Southern Mexico and waited to catch the trains North in search of more economic opportunity.

3. COYOTES Since the border build-up, many coyotes, or human smugglers, have become part of highly organized and powerful crime syndicates. This essay will examine how coyotes are small, but integral cogs in the burgeoning illegal immigration system, that will continue to grow in the absence of a coherent national immigration policy. This story will focus on the smugglers' "live fast/die young" ethos and examine the contradictory

attitudes many migrants hold toward the smugglers. Coyotes are simultaneously hated, feared, admired and desperately needed by Mexicans and Central Americans who desire entry to the United States. In 2003 I developed close relationships with coyotes who helped me to gain access to photographing migrants crossing from Reynosa, Mexico into McAllen, Texas. Last summer I met more coyotes in the border town of Nogales, Mexico. I plan to return to these places to further document the role of coyotes in this risky process.

4. HIDDEN DOMESTICS explores the lives of female domestic workers in the nation's two largest cities—Los Angeles and New York. These women often become victims of unscrupulous employers all too willing to exploit their undocumented status. Juana Nicolas, an undocumented immigrant and former domestic turned advocate, will help me connect with these women.

I will follow women domestics both on the job and when they return home to their own families to document the oppression they experience, hidden from the public and with no meaningful legal recourse. This part of the project will uncover a hidden story and dramatically illustrate the blatant contradiction between the market for immigrant labor and the migrants' illegal status.

5. THROWAWAY WORKERS explores the shattered lives of undocumented workers who have been seriously disabled while working illegally in the United States. These men and women receive few, if any health benefits and have almost no safety net whether they stay in the United States or are deported to Mexico. Already prone to abuse and working in extremely dangerous industries, undocumented migrants who become disabled in most cases are thwarted from receiving the workers' compensation benefits to which they are legally entitled. Instead, most often they become stuck in a cultural limbo, dependent on friends and family, suffering from depression and unfortunately, the vast majority are unable to support themselves.

6. LATINOS REMAKE RURAL AMERICA illustrates the potential, pitfalls and cultural clashes that accompany the reshaping of some of the nation's most remote areas. Traditionally, Latino migrants have moved to urban centers; Los Angeles and Chicago are home to the nation's two largest Mexican populations. More recently, though, migrants have chosen to live in rural towns to find work, avoid urban ills and reside in areas that more closely resemble their home communities in Mexico. The infusion of this new population has given new life to many of these moribund areas. But many migrants also confront government raids and native residents' racism and consistent hostility.

I will focus on Beardstown, Illinois, a town of 5,000 people in Central Illinois whose exploding Latino community has grown from almost nothing ten years ago to close to half the local population today. The majority of the migrants come to work in the Cargill Meat Solutions plant, but recently Immigrations and Customs Enforcement raided the Beardstown plant. Many families were separated as parents and children were deported and some of the men and women arrested still languish in prison.

I arrived in Beardstown the first evening after the raid and spent three weeks interviewing and photographing people in the town. For weeks after the raid a tense pall fell over the small town. Many of the Latino migrants stayed in their homes and some even left town for fear of further persecution.

This story will examine the growing cultural clash occurring in small towns throughout the United States as these traditionally white communities deal with the massive influx of foreign-born newcomers. It will also highlight the immigration system's failings and demonstrate how undocumented migrants' labor is desired, but their personal lives are considered irrelevant.



On July 19, 2006 more than 10,000 immigrants, advocates and activists continued the demonstrations for immigrant rights and amnesty. The number of Latino immigrants moving out from the shadows and into the streets surprised the nation.





Migrants wait to cross into the Rio Grande on their way to the United States. Pedro Mendoza, lower right corner, lives in Reynosa and has worked as a low-level coyote.



A Mexican migrant crosses the Rio Grande on his way to the United States near McAllen, Texas. Although Arizona is more notorious due to the high number of deaths in the desert from exposure, migrants do die in the shifting waters of the Rio Grande. These migrants arrived safely at their destination.





(previous page) This El Salvadoran man made it to the United States, but died from exposure about 50 yards from a cattle pond in the Sonora desert near Sells, Arizona. More than 4,000 migrants have died attempting to cross the United States/Mexico border since 1994 and the advent of Operation Gatekeeper in California. Unfortunately, the bodies of many other migrants who die are never recovered and bones of migrants are sometimes found in the desert years after their passing.

Indigent burial in Arizona. United States and Mexican officials make every attempt to repatriate migrants who die on the path north, but sometimes it's impossible to locate relatives and the migrants are buried in the U.S. This practice is controversial because some U.S. taxpayers don't want their money to go for undocumented people's burials.



A group of Mexican migrants being detained in a Border Patrol Truck. These migrants were captured in a 'safe house' in a trailer park in Yuma, Arizona.



Border Patrol
Special Response
Team training
in New Mexico.
BORTAC and
SRT are SWAT
style divisions
of the Border
Patrol aimed
at interdicting
criminals and
undocumented
migrants crossing
the border.





Throughout the spring and summer millions of immigrants and activists marched to advocate for immigrants' rights. In March, more than 100,000 immigrants, social activists and advocates hit the streets of Chicago and showed the nation that Latinos were a potent political force. This march sparked a season of protests across the country.

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REMEMBER
THIS NOVEMBER
(and in 2008)









Migrant workers plant cabbage near McAllen, Texas. These workers had no idea how much they were going to be paid for the day.



Detained migrants wait to be removed from the Border Patrol Headquarters in McAllen, Texas.



Life in the United States working long hours at a factory and caring for a household takes its toll on Remedios Nino. Here she counts \$4,500 dollars to send to a "coyote" to pay for passage to the United States for three adult family members waiting in a Phoenix hotel room. Several years ago Remedios and her sister Lupe Guzman decided that it would be more profitable to work for themselves than to struggle for day labor agencies, so they opened an 'elote' cart where they sell corn, candy and drinks. The sisters earn more money and control the hours that they work.



Remedios and her sister Lupe at home with their family in the Back of the Yards on Chicago's South Side. The sisters moved from their home in Acapulco, Mexico to improve their economic conditions. Although they are relatively poor by American standards, the sister have more opportunities than in Mexico where Lupe earned \$40 per week cleaning hotel rooms at an Acapulco resort. At least 50 people from the Nino and Guzman families have come north from Mexico to settle in Chicago and other parts of the United States.





