

Immigration Still Makes America What It Is;

Sophisticated Crossings

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Body

To the Editor:

"Bar the Door" by David James (Op-Ed, July 25) urges that we fortify and militarize our southern border so as to seal it against entry by "illegal aliens." Like so many advocates of sterner measures, he may have underestimated the amount of leakage through official border checkpoints.

People interested in solving the "illegal alien" problem would do well to talk to typical undocumented migrants, both in Mexico and in this country. As a matter of human interest, I have listened to many describe their experiences. Most appear to be from poor families. Some survive on handouts or have odd jobs or seasonal work in Mexico, but they make job-seeking trips to the United States to earn extra money for their impoverished families in Mexico.

Novices try sneaking across the border at night and often have to make several tries before they make it. Experienced migrants usually have friends on the American side who can lend them I.D.'s with photos of legal residents whom they resemble. Their friends drive to Tijuana, for example, meet the migrant, coach him on what to say in answer to questions that might be asked by immigration officials and smuggle him in. Any guess as to how many migrants enter using this and other stratagems is just that -- a guess.

If we have millions of illegal aliens in our country, we ought to consider every practical option for knowing who they are and for monitoring their presence here. The best option I am aware of is the proposal to legalize short-term entry for prescreened Mexicans. They would be required to present certificates from their home communities that they do not have police records. They would get photo I.D.'s showing their place of residence in Mexico and their nearest relatives. The I.D. would have an expiration date requiring return to Mexico before that time or subject to extension under certain circumstances.

E. MANNING GILES

San Antonio, July 26, 1992

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Drawing

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