

Drug violence floods border Mexicans seek refuge with special visas, but few are granted asylum.

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Byline: By JAMES C. MCKINLEY Jr. • New York Times

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Body

FORT HANCOCK, Texas - The giant rusty fence of metal bars along the **border** here, built in recent years to keep illegal immigrants from crossing into the United States, has a new nickname among area residents: Jurassic Park Gate, a nod to the barrier in a 1993 movie that kept dangerous dinosaurs at bay in a theme park.

On the other side, a brutal war between **drug** gangs has forced dozens of fearful families from the Mexican town of El Porvenir to come to the **border seeking** political **asylum**, and scores of other **Mexicans** have used **special visas** known as **border**-crossing cards to flee into the United States. They say **drug** gangs fighting for control of the trade have laid waste to their town, burning down houses and killing people in the street.

Americans are taking in their Mexican relatives, and the schools have swelled with traumatized children, many of whom have witnessed gangland **violence**, school officials say.

The story of Fort Hancock, 57 miles southeast of El Paso on the Rio Grande, is echoed along the Texas **border** with Mexico, from Brownsville to El Paso. As the **violence** among **drug** gangs continues to spiral out of control in Mexico, more Mexican citizens are **seeking refuge** in the United States.

About 2,000 people live here, in ramshackle trailer homes, weather-battered recreational vehicles and well-kept brick houses.

Not everyone coming from El Porvenir is **seeking asylum**. Many **Mexicans** in towns along the river have **special border**-crossing cards, which let them cross for up to 30 days to do business and shop near the **border**. But some have used the **visas** to relocate their families temporarily to Fort Hancock and other small towns on the Texas side.

In El Paso alone, the police estimate that at least 30,000 **Mexicans** have moved across the **border** in the past two years because of the **violence** in Juarez and the river towns to the southeast. So many people have left El Porvenir and nearby Guadalupe Bravos that the two resemble ghost towns, former residents say.

People without access to **visas**, however, have been **seeking asylum**, even at the risk of being detained for months. In the early days of the conflict, most of the **asylum**-seekers were journalists, police officers and officials who had been threatened by organized crime. But now people with ordinary jobs are showing up at the **border** and saying they fear for their lives.

But **few Mexicans** are **granted asylum**. Over the last three federal fiscal years, immigration judges heard 9,317 requests across the country and **granted** only 183.

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