



Identifying the dead along our southern border: Immigration, Regulation, Forensic Anthropology, and Human Rights

Bruce E. Anderson, Heather J.H. Edgar, Tessa Lee, and Kate Spradley

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 25 • 3:00 PM MST • Register to attend at: <https://bit.ly/2YYkEWp>

Migrants from Latin America cross the U.S. border seeking a better life. To call this crossing harsh grossly understates the difficulties these people encounter. Some lose their lives in the effort. The actual number of border-related migrant deaths cannot be known, but the U.N. estimates over 800 in 2019. Investigating those deaths and identifying the unknown are monumental tasks.

Along the border region those who care for the dead, coroners, forensic pathologists, death investigators, and others, face a patchwork of laws that govern medico-legal death investigation. Because of the remoteness and harsh conditions along much of the border, a significant portion of the work identifying migrants falls to forensic anthropologists, specialists trained to analyze skeletal remains. This event is a moderated discussion by forensic anthropologists working on border deaths and border issues in Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas.

Bruce E Anderson is a Forensic Anthropologist for the Pima County Office of the Medical Examiner (PCOME), in Tucson, Arizona. Dr Anderson received his PhD degree in 1998 from the University of Arizona, where he is an Adjunct Assistant Professor of Anthropology. Prior to his position with the PCOME, he served as Senior Anthropologist for the US Army's Central Identification Laboratory in Hawaii (CILHI) where his principal duties were the field recovery and laboratory analyses leading towards identification of human remains associated with past US military conflicts.



Heather J.H. Edgar, Ph.D., is Associate Professor of Anthropology and Forensic Anthropologist for the Office of the Medical Investigator, New Mexico. She received her education at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (BA), Arizona State University (MA) and Ohio State University (PhD). She is the project director for the New Mexico Decedent Image Database, which provides free access for qualified researchers to de-identified, richly documented CT scans of over 15,000 decedents. Her current research includes improving the identification of missing and murdered American Indians, and investigating inequity related to mortality, ethnicity, and other factors among New Mexicans.



Tessa Lee currently serves as a Medical Examiner Investigator III for the San Diego County Medical Examiner's Office. She worked from 2008 to 2010 as a Forensic Field Agent for the Pima County Office of the Medical Examiner in Tucson, Arizona and was promoted to Medicolegal Death Investigator in 2010. She was hired for her current position in 2014. As part of her duties, she manages the Unidentified Decedent Program for the office and oversees all efforts to identify decedents including fingerprint comparisons, forensic odontology, forensic anthropology, and DNA submissions. Due to San Diego County's location along the U.S.-Mexico Border, the Medical Examiner's Office investigates a significant number of migrant and immigration-related deaths.



Kate Spradley is a professor of anthropology at Texas State University. She received her PhD in anthropology in 2006 from the University of Tennessee and her BA and MA from the University of Arkansas. Her most recent work includes a collaborative project documenting migrant cemeteries and what she terms "invisible graves" in South Texas. Since 2013, she has directed a humanitarian and human rights project called Operation Identification, housed within the Forensic Anthropology Center at Texas State, with the goal of identifying and repatriating unidentified human remains found near the Texas/Mexico border through community outreach, forensic anthropological analysis, and collaboration with governmental and nongovernmental organizations. Kate is also co-founder and board member of the Forensic Border Coalition whose mission is to support families of missing migrants searching for their loved ones and to address problems related to the identification of human remains found near the US/Mexico border.



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