

BOX 11.1 ARCHAEOLOGY OF UNDOCUMENTED MIGRATION

The Undocumented Migration Project is a long-term ethnographic and archaeological study of undocumented crossings in contemporary times, by foot, from northern Mexico into the United States via the Sonoran desert. The project is led by Jason De León at UCLA.

The archaeological component of the project focuses on documenting the material remains left behind during the desert crossings. The artifacts provide a plethora of insight into the process of border crossing. De León (2012, 478) uses discarded water bottles, shoes, and clothes, for

example, to “illustrate that the use of these items is determined by a complex and culturally shaped set of processes influenced by many factors including economic constraints, folk logic, enforcement practices, migrant perceptions of Border patrol and the human smuggling industry.” He writes that “those who characterize the artifacts left behind by migrants as mere trash ... fail to recognize the historical, political, and global economic forces that have shaped border crossing into a well-structured social process.” One example is the recent production of black plastic water bottles to capitalize on