

UNDERWORLDS AND POLITICS AT THE
U.S.-MEXICO BORDER

SEBASTIAN

"Sebastian Rotella's passionate reporting on the street kids of San Diego led me to write 'Balboa Park.'

His Twilight on the Line makes clear just what's at stake on our nation's southern frontier."

# Twilight on the Line

Underworlds and Politics at the U.S.-Mexico Border

SEBASTIAN ROTELLA



W. W. NORTON & COMPANY
New York • London

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The text of this book is composed in Adobe Times with the display set in Bureau Agency.

Desktop composition by JoAnn Schambier.

Manufacturing by The Courier Companies, Inc.

Book design by Charlotte Staub.

#### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Rotella, Sebastian,

Twilight on the line: underworlds and politics at the U.S.-Mexico border / Sebastian Rotella.

p. cm.

Includes index.

#### ISBN 0-393-04113-1

Drug traffic—Mexican-American Border Region.
 Gangs—Mexican-American Border Region.
 Crime—Mexican-American Border Region.

4. Illegal aliens-Mexican-American Border Region.

I. Title.

HV5831.M46R67 1997

363.45'0972'1-dc21

97-11890

CIP

W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 500 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10110 http://www.wwnorton.com

W. W. Norton & Company Ltd., 10 Coptic Street, London WC1A 1PU

1234567890

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For

Carmen and Valeria

with love



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### My thanks to:

The many editors and reporters at the *Los Angeles Times*—a wonderful place to work—who have shared with me their kindness and wisdom every step of the way, especially Alan Acosta, Simon Li and Dale Fetherling: three good and kind bosses. And Patrick McDonnell, Mark Fineman, Don Bartletti, and Juanita Darling, admired colleagues and friends with whom I had the pleasure of working. And my friends and colleagues in the San Diego office.

My friends in the press corps in Tijuana and elsewhere in Mexico. I am indebted to them for their hospitality, solidarity, courage and sense of humor, especially Miguel Cervantes, Dora Elena Cortés, Manuel Cordero, Sergio Haro and Ignacio Rodríguez Reyna.

A list of dedicated and helpful people including Alan Bersin, Víctor Clark Alfaro, Gustavo De La Viña, Miguel Escobar, Antonio García Sánchez, Marcela Merino, Adolfo Gonzalez, Roberto Martinez, Rudy Murillo, José Luis Pérez Canchola, Gabriel Rosas, Gov. Ernesto Ruffo, Claudia Smith, Javier Valenzuela, Manuel Valenzuela and colleagues at the College of the Northern Border, and Vicente Villalvazo.

Jorge Alberto Duarte for his help and hospitality and a lesson in courage and sacrifice.

Numerous and necessarily anonymous men and women in law enforcement and government in the United States and Mexico who helped me see a hazy world more clearly, sometimes at considerable risk. They were invaluable and they have my thanks and admiration.

The migrants and working people on both sides of the line who took time out of their journeys to talk to a stranger.

Bonnie Nadell, an agent from heaven, and Alane Mason, a talented and dogged editor.

Bruce Springsteen, for the inspiration and for the border songs.

Jim Shepard and George Garrett with respect and gratitude.

My brothers, Carlo and Sal, for trenchant comments and musketeer-like solidarity.

My parents for everything, especially for teaching me that work is good for you.

My parents-in-law for eleventh-hour assistance, the relatives on both sides of the ocean, and the memory of those departed.

The fellas, Chicago and Michigan chapters.

The good folks at Seventh near B and Big Boy.

Last but most important: Carmen for her love and patience; as always, she helped me understand what I had seen and what I had not; without her there would be no border stories. And Valeria, the best border story of all.

Twilight on the Line



## The View from Big Boy

n the movie *Casablanca*, everybody went to Rick's Café Américain.

In Tijuana, the Mexican border city that has taken on a cinematic air of intrigue, everybody goes to Bob's Big Boy (El Big).

Cops, journalists, spies, lawyers, gangsters, entrepreneurs, political bosses, human rights activists, former, current and future government officials—they all haunt the diner with the statue of the short fat guy in front. El Big serves around-the-clock coffee, burgers, enchiladas, the classic trans-border menu. But the hottest item is the conversation about news and politics, crime and conspiracy: a web of whispers as labyrinthine and melodramatic as the reality of the border itself.

Big Boy occupies a prime location on Agua Caliente Boulevard, Tijuana's main drag. Agua Caliente Boulevard starts near the border in the old downtown, the fabled Avenida Revolución tourist district, and extends across this city of about 1.5 million, the biggest Mexican metropolis on the international line. The boulevard runs past the bullring, past the Agua Caliente racetrack owned by Jorge Hank Rhon, a flamboyant tycoon from one of Mexico's wealthiest political clans. His racetrack security guards assassinated