

THE MINUTEMAN CORPS OF CALIFORNIA: CIVILIAN BORDER PATROLS  
AND THE PRODUCTION OF POWER AND DIFFERENCE AT THE  
MEXICO-U.S BORDER

By

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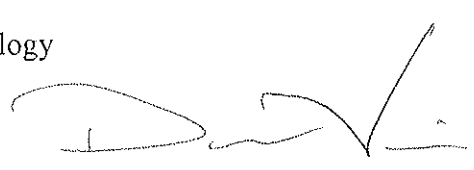
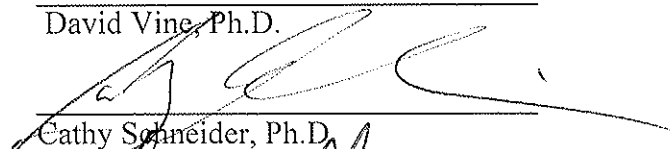
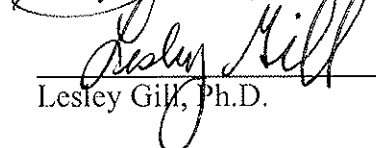

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ABSTRACT

In 2005, civilian border patrols gained increased popularity with the emergence of the Minuteman Project and the Minuteman Civil Defense Corps (MCDC). Unlike other anti-immigration organizations, the Minutemen focus their efforts primarily on conducting armed civilian patrols on the U.S.-Mexico border, and to a lesser extent the U.S.-Canada border. This dissertation provides an ethnography of one such civilian border patrol—the Minuteman Corps of California (MCC)—detailing their activities, reasons for conducting armed patrols, and their developing relationship with official border policing agencies.

This dissertation shows that individuals who joined the Minutemen generally did so because they experienced feelings of political disenchantment and physical and economic insecurity due to the political, economic, and cultural changes brought about by neoliberalism and transnational flows of people, ideas, and capital. Most blamed non-white immigrants from Mexico and to a lesser extent Asia and the Middle East for

spreading poverty, government dependence, crime, and terrorism, and for disempowering white American voters.

While the Minutemen blamed the government for failing to protect U.S. citizens from the assumed perils of immigration by people of color, in conducting armed border patrols, they also became dependent upon a responsive and cooperative state to achieve their individual and organizational goals. Lacking official police powers, civilian border patrols are dependent upon the state in ways that contradict their view of a largely indifferent and irresponsible government. In negotiating their ambivalent relationship with the state, the Minutemen adapted their tactics to more closely resemble official police efforts including wearing uniforms and increasing their violence-wielding capacity. In short, the Minutemen represent neither an extension of state authority nor a challenge to it. Instead, what we see is a process by which a group of individuals who feel disempowered by widespread political and economic processes seek to access and harness the coercive power of the state. In so doing, the Minutemen further legitimize the power of the state to define, through punitive action, who belongs and who does not within the ideological and physical boundaries of the nation.

In sum, the ease with which the Minutemen have been able to adopt state policing strategies reveals decades of escalating state violence directed at migrant populations at the border. What is more, the Minutemen may also reflect a troubling development within contemporary U.S. politics: the growing belief that the sole and proper role of government is to provide physical security that is promoted and protected primarily by the police, military, and an armed citizenry.

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACLU	American Civil Liberties Union
BP	Border Patrol
BPAUX	Border Patrol Auxiliary
CCIR	California Coalition for Immigration Reform
CIS	Center for Immigration Studies
COMM. CENTER	Communications Center
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
FAIR	Federation for American Immigration Reform
IA	Illegal Alien
MCC	Minuteman Corps of California
MCDC	Minuteman Civil Defense Corps
MSU	Mobile Surveillance Unit
MEChA	Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán
NYD	Not Yet Democrat
OTM	Other Than Mexican
TBS	Turn Back South



## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In the winter, fall, and spring, heavy cold winds blow through the mountain desert in east San Diego County. In the summer months, those winds carry dry hot air across a land baked by the sun. Travelling on Interstate 8 from San Diego, the elevation rises rapidly and peaks at just over 4,000 feet above sea level. Pine trees near the unincorporated town of Alpine give way to desert chaparral characterized by broad stretches of sage and Manzanita interrupted by the rocky outcrops that litter the windswept peaks. Large electric signs lure motorists to the casinos, shopping malls, music venues, and restaurants that interrupt broad stretches of mostly empty landscape.

To the south of the interstate, Old Highway 80 and Highway 94 wind their way past other unincorporated towns with old west names like Campo, Tierra Del Sol, Live Oak Springs and Boulevard. Rows of locally owned diners and restaurants, candy and ice cream, and curio and antique shops with their faded and weathered signs give the area a quiet and sedate feel. The faded and peeling paint from storefront signs mark the passage of time, but also give the communities a timeless feel.

The farther east you go the sparser the population. Homes sit farther apart. Paved roads intersect with dirt roads. The sprawling San Diego metropolis marked by close groupings of multiple cities, suburbs, and gated communities give way to sparsely populated towns separated by broad stretches of barely populated lands. Here in the

eastern extreme of San Diego county, reservation, private, and public lands butt up against each other, their boundaries unmarked.

It is here that a dwindling flow of illicit cross border traffic moves northward from Mexico to destinations throughout the United States. Since 1995, when the Border Patrol initiated Operation Gatekeeper, a border enforcement initiative that focused law enforcement resources on a five-mile stretch of border from the California coast to the San Ysidro port of entry, clandestine border traffic has steadily shifted east. Between 1994 and 2004, Border Patrol apprehensions declined from nearly 300,000 apprehensions to below 20,000 in the San Ysidro/Chula Vista corridor. In contrast, apprehensions in eastern San Diego County increased from 150,000 to nearly 300,000 in the year following Operation Gatekeeper. In 2004, that number had once again declined to 120,000 apprehensions as clandestine traffic shifted and became increasingly concentrated in the Tucson, Arizona area (Haddal, Kim, and Garcia 2009:12-15).

And it is here that a small group of committed activists gather each month to try to take a stand against what they call a “flood” and an “invasion” of “illegal” immigrants and drugs. They form just one of many anti-immigration organizations that are active in state and national politics. Organizations such as the California Coalition for Immigration Reform (CCIR), Voices of Citizens Together (VCT) which later became the American Border Patrol and then just the American Patrol, Save Our State (SOS), not to mention local chapters of the Federation for Immigration Reform (FAIR) and other national anti-immigration organizations have been instrumental in the passage of harsh anti-immigrant measures in California. Proposition 187, also known as the Save Our State Initiative, which was drafted by the California Coalition for Immigration Reform and Voices of

Citizens Together and passed into law in 1994, prohibited undocumented immigrants from accessing public education and health care services. Though the initiative was later declared unconstitutional, its passage signaled widespread concern over undocumented immigration and the power of anti-immigration organizations in California. That power became evident once again when voters overwhelmingly passed Proposition 227 in 1998, a law that virtually eliminated bilingual education in public school classrooms.

Unlike CCIR, VCT, and SOS, the individuals that gather near the border in east San Diego County strap on handguns, carry shotguns and high powered hunting and assault rifles, and in some cases clothe themselves in body armor, taking to the borderlands in search of clandestine border crossers. Some gather regularly and are part of organized groups. Others come once and never return. And some stop by whenever their time or desire allows, and operate alone or with whoever happens to be also working in the area. Together these groups of individuals constitute a small but important segment of a broader social movement that seeks to secure the privileges of citizenship for a selected few by patrolling the border in search of clandestine border crossers. These civilian border patrols have been called vigilantes by some and patriots by others, but they are more commonly referred to as “minutemen,” named after the Minuteman Project. The Minuteman Project, which in turn took its name from the Revolutionary War militias that fought the British, brought national attention to civilian border patrols by organizing a nationwide protest event at the Arizona-Mexico border in 2005.

And it is here in the vast stretches of high mountain desert along the California-Mexico border that the Minuteman Corps of California (MCC) gather each month to patrol the border in an attempt to stop undocumented immigration. The Minuteman Corps

of California was first organized in 2006 as the California chapter of the Minuteman Civil Defense Corps (MCDC). The MCDC was once the nation's largest minuteman organization. Prior to folding in 2010, the MCDC boasted chapters in a majority of states and in multiple California regions. The members of the California chapter of the MCDC created the MCC so that they could lease the land upon which their base of operations was built. Creating the MCC had the added benefit of allowing its members to continue their affiliation with the MCDC, but also retain a level of autonomy from the national organization.<sup>1</sup>

The MCC is but one of many civilian border patrol organizations that operate at various locations along the United States' northern and southern borders. These groups share many of the same characteristics that distinguish them from other anti-immigrant organizations. Like more "mainstream" anti-immigration organizations, the MCC and other civilian border patrol groups seek to influence public opinion and pressure lawmakers to enforce existing immigration laws, prevent new laws that would soften enforcement efforts and grant amnesty, and enact new laws and policies that would result in greater restrictions on immigration and cross-border migratory traffic.

Unlike most anti-immigration groups however, civilian border patrol organizations focus almost exclusively on conducting armed border watches and patrols at the physical border between the United States and Mexico, and to a lesser extent, the United States and Canada. Though some minuteman organizations, particularly those that operate in states that are removed from the border, participate in other types of activities

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<sup>1</sup> For reasons of clarity and consistency I refer to the California chapter of the MCDC and its successor, the Minuteman Corps of California (MCC), collectively as the MCC. I use "MCDC" to refer to the national Minuteman organization, of which the MCC was an affiliate. When I refer to the MCC,

such as surveillance and protests at day labor hiring sites, participation in city council meetings, seminars, symposia, and other educational efforts, civilian border patrols are the primary method that minuteman organizations use to effect change.

The members of the MCC gather at a private site that they call Camp Vigilance. Camp Vigilance is nestled in a valley between reservation land, public lands, and the unincorporated towns of Tierra Del Sol and Live Oak Springs, and sits fifty miles east of the city of San Diego and just two miles north of the U.S.-Mexico border. The MCC “muster” at Camp Vigilance for the entire months of April and October and for one weekend the remaining ten months. The eight acres upon which Camp Vigilance sits constitutes the easternmost portion of a private campground owned by a Greek immigrant from Djibouti who is also a member.

A simple swing arm fence marked by “No Trespassing” signs and flanked by tractor tires and a wire fence opens up to a dirt path that leads to a clearing at the heart of Camp Vigilance. Trees surround the camp to the west and northeast and a large hill forms the northern boundary of the camp. At the center of the clearing in the trees, a lone oak tree stands sentinel. A 19th century stagecoach depot stands at the north end of the clearing. The depot serves as the MCC’s meeting place, dining room, and bunkhouse. Its walls are a combination of brick and adobe.

The depot is divided into five rooms. The main entrance of the building opens up to the serving area, where meals are served. Beyond the serving area is the meeting room where the MCC hosts twice daily meetings where members are briefed on day and night border patrol “operations,” or “ops” for short. To the left of the serving area is the kitchen and a storage room. To the right, another meeting room with a large desk and chairs hosts

seminars and trainings. To the right of that is a room with a series of pallets or bunks that are attached to the walls. Members who do not own an RV or tent pay to sleep here.

To the west of the depot a small camper trailer sits next to a barn-like shack. The shack serves as storage for equipment and surplus supplies that belong to the property owner. The RV is home to the caretaker of the property who lives on the grounds year-round and is employed by the property owner. Between the depot and the shack, a series of RV hookups rise from the ground. Immediately to the east of the bunkhouse sits a converted trailer that contains two full bathrooms in the back and a Communications Center (Comm. Center) that houses the group's surveillance equipment and two-way radios. From the Comm. Center, a single Minuteman volunteer coordinates communication between teams out on border watch operations and the U.S. Border Patrol. Virtually all of the improvements on the property including the installation of the Comm. Center and renovations to the depot were made by the MCC. A massive American flag flies over the entrance to the camp and a second, smaller flag stands between the depot and Comm. Center.

From Camp Vigilance, the MCC organizes and runs its armed border patrols. These patrols consist of both overt and covert surveillance activities at all hours of the day and night. The MCC maintains a strict "Standard Operating Procedure" (SOP) that limits their activity to observing and reporting suspected illegal border crossing activity. In so doing, the members of the MCC come into contact with clandestine border crossers and state agents alike. Lacking police powers to arrest the MCC must rely on the Border Patrol to apprehend and detain undocumented immigrants.

How do we account for the emergence of civilian border patrols in the United States during the early 21st century? What are the political, economic, and sociocultural features of U.S. life that help us understand the rise of armed civilian patrols? Why do civilian border patrols focus almost exclusively on carrying out armed patrols in favor of other anti-immigration activism? What do civilian border patrols tell us about the contours of American nationalism and the dimensions of the state? Do civilian border patrols represent a challenge to or an extension of state authority?

In this dissertation I attempt to show how civilian border patrols emerge as a result of socioeconomic shifts brought about by globalization and neoliberalism, widespread anti-immigrant discourse and activism, and official border security efforts that increasingly define immigration regulation as border policing. I argue that civilian border patrols emerged as a result of socioeconomic changes fostered by neoliberalism. These include the economic disruptions and dislocations caused by neoliberal economic shifts, welfare state retrenchment, and the expansion and militarization of the police, which have resulted in widespread feelings of disempowerment, dislocation, and endangerment. Individuals who joined the Minutemen did so because they experienced feelings of political disenchantment and physical and economic insecurity. Drawing on a broadly based anti-immigration discourse, Minuteman volunteers described the effects of neoliberalism as a threat to the nation by defining the American nation as white, conservative, and Christian. Minuteman volunteers described armed border patrols as a necessary and significant way to address non-white immigration on an individual as well as collective level. In so doing, the Minutemen drew inspiration from official policing efforts. Not only do civilian border patrols draw inspiration from the tactical and strategic

efforts of the state, but they also rely on a cooperative and responsive state to carry out their organizational goals. Lacking police powers, civilian border patrols are dependent upon the state in ways that contradict their view of a largely indifferent and irresponsible government. They further rely on the state not just to carry out their organizational goals, but also to legitimize Minuteman activity through voicing private and public approval of their actions. In negotiating their ambivalent relationship with the state, the Minutemen adapted their tactics to more closely resemble official police efforts including wearing uniforms and increasing their violence wielding capacity. In short, the Minutemen do not represent either an extension of state authority or a challenge to it. Instead, what we see is the process by which a group of individuals who feel disempowered by widespread political and economic processes seek to access the coercive power of the state. In so doing, the Minutemen further legitimize the power of the state to define, through punitive action, who belongs and who does not within the ideological and physical bounds of the nation. The Minutemen thus reflect a troubling development within contemporary U.S. politics, that is the growing belief that the sole and proper role of government is to provide physical security that is promoted and protected exclusively by the military and an increasingly militarized police.

### Explaining Anti-Immigration Activism

Traditionally, scholars who study anti-immigration legislation, activity, and discourse have described U.S. immigration history as periods of relative openness vis-à-vis immigration interrupted by periods of intense anti-immigration activity. While scholars note that an undercurrent of fear of foreigners has persisted throughout U.S.



history (Higham 1963), they tend to focus on those moments when anti-immigration sentiment gains traction in the hearts and minds of a broad spectrum of the public. John Higham argues that nativist waves that periodically gained ascendance during the period from 1860 to 1925 exhibited three central themes: anti-Catholic, anti-radical, and racial nativism. Though he does not focus on the political and economic contexts within which these movements emerged, he does touch on the ways that political strife, industrialization, and economic turmoil resulted in the disruption of national unities. Absent direct external threat, immigrants became a convenient target for nationalist agitation.

Though contemporary waves of anti-immigrant activism do not share the same targets, they do exhibit some of the same characteristics. According to Joe Feagin (1997), historic and contemporary waves of anti-immigration sentiment draw on four themes. First, immigrants should be excluded because they are less intelligent and culturally distinct. Second, because immigrants are intellectually and culturally inferior they are also unassimilable. Third, immigrants take jobs away from “natives” and cause economic disruptions that limit the economic opportunities of “Americans.” Finally, immigrants have a negative political effect, for example by corrupting the voting system or over-relying on government assistance. Charles Jaret (1999:15-16) adds that past and contemporary waves of anti-immigrant sentiment result in heightened levels of violence against immigrants.

However, according to some scholars, there are some notable differences between contemporary and past waves of anti-immigration activity. According to Jaret (1999:16), contemporary immigration opponents focus on “illegal immigration” as the biggest cause

of the current immigration “crisis.” Another significant difference that Jaret identifies between past and current periods of anti-immigration activity is the way that past movements were able to enact laws that overtly discriminated against particular classes of immigrants. Past laws prohibited specific groups from working, voting, and owning property. The contemporary period, Jaret argues, is characterized by few discriminatory controls and no measures that effectively decrease migration to the United States.

However, there is a growing effort on the part of some state and municipal legislators to institute new measures that would prohibit undocumented immigrants from working, renting and owning property, and accessing basic social services such as education and health care. The passage of a law in Hazleton, Pennsylvania which made it illegal to rent housing to undocumented immigrants, laws in Arizona and Alabama that empower traffic police to pull over and detain any one they suspect of being undocumented (the Alabama law further makes it a crime for any non-citizen to fail to carry a passport or immigration papers), and contemporary efforts to repeal or alter the 14th Amendment seek to deny birthright citizenship, reveal that there is growing acceptance for discriminatory legislation.

In short, opposition to some forms of immigration has always been present throughout U.S. history. On the other hand, as Aristide Zolberg argues, the United States has always sought to attract other kinds of immigrants. The United States has always sought to attract desirable immigrants and restrict the migration of groups that are deemed less culturally, economically, biologically, and politically fit to be members of U.S. society. Even immigration legislation that appears to be restrictive or liberal often contained within it language that restricted some immigration opportunities while

opening up others. For example, the immigration Act of 1924 dramatically curtailed southern and eastern European and Asian immigration at the same time that it opened up immigration from Mexico and Latin America (Zolberg 2006). Later, the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 liberalized immigration from Europe and Asia and introduced the first restrictions on Mexican and Latin American immigration.

### Immigration and Nationalism

Zolberg urges us to reject thinking about U.S. immigration policy as a sign of the triumph of a polar struggle between those who wish to impose outright restrictions on immigration and those who wish for no restrictions. Instead, Zolberg argues, immigration and its regulation have always been a key feature in U.S. nation building efforts precisely because it allowed political and economic elites an opportunity to decide who could and could not belong to the nation—indeed, what peoples, moralities, beliefs, and abilities constituted the “American” nation.

Peter Sahlin defines national identity as “a socially constructed and continuous process of defining ‘friend’ and ‘enemy’ (1989:270). He argues that such distinctions do not depend on any “objective” difference; rather they rely on subjective experiences of difference. National identity is thus “contingent and relational: it is defined by the social or territorial boundaries drawn to distinguish the collective self and its implicit negation, the other” (Sahlin 1989:271). Over time, U.S. immigration policy reflected both shifts in the dynamics of immigration and shifts in the ways that “Americans” thought about immigrants and immigration. Today, there is no broad consensus on the relative value of immigrants vis-à-vis the nation. Some herald the strong work ethic, commitment to

family, and drive for generational upward mobility as a sign of immigrants' suitability to be incorporated into the fabric of the American nation. Others claim the opposite, identifying immigrants as lazy, sexually deviant, and economically backward and thus ineligible for incorporation. Whether they object to immigration or appreciate it, very few advocate allowing any and all potential immigrants to pass freely into the United States.

### Economic Shifts

Scholars have often noted how processes such as globalization have challenged modern definitions of nation (and state), borders, and culture. For example, borderland scholars describe how those who live along borders often produce cultural systems that contain dimensions of both sides of the border, thus creating a separate "hybrid" identity (Anzaldúa 1999; Gómez-Peña 1996). Scholars have further argued that the shift from a "fordist" mode of production that emphasized "extremely large production facilities, a relatively stable work force, and the welfare state, to a post-fordist model of "flexible accumulation" that is characterized by "small-batch production, rapid shifts in product lines, extremely fast movements of capital," (Gupta and Ferguson 1992: 8-9) and multi-locational production have coincided with the stagnation of worker's wages, increasing insecurity, and welfare state retrenchment have further challenged old solidarities upon which national identity was constructed (Harvey 1989, Calavita 1996).

Many scholars argue that contemporary anti-immigration activism, as in the past, is tied to the economic shifts that are challenging national unity and homogeneity. Wayne Cornelius (1982) examines three waves of anti-Mexican nativism throughout U.S. history and suggests that increases in nativism coincided with economic downturns. Kitty

Calavita (1996) argues that the political economic shifts associated with post-Fordism, and the “balanced-budget conservatism” that accompanies them, explain in large part why anti-immigration sentiment resulted in the passage of California’s Proposition 187. Alvarez and Butterfield (2000) echo Calavita’s claims and argue that Proposition 187 resulted from “cyclical nativism” caused by a downturn in California’s economy. According to these authors there appears to be a connection between the economy, including economic competition, and the rise of anti-immigration fervor.

However, other scholarship contradicts this point of view. For example, Espenshade and Calhoun’s (1993) study on public opinion toward immigrants shows that economic competition was a poor indicator of anti-immigrant sentiment. According to their study, household income was unrelated to attitudes about the issue of undocumented immigration and its perceived effects. Moreover, employed persons exhibited contradictory opinions on undocumented immigration, at once being less likely to believe that undocumented immigration was a problem, but more likely to dislike undocumented immigrants. Other public opinion research found that personal economic circumstances play little role in one’s beliefs about immigration. Even Alvarez and Butterfield (2000), who claim that economic concerns fueled anti-immigration activity in the mid-1990s, show that personal economic conditions are not significantly associated with opinion about immigration. Instead they show that *perceptions* of the economy coincided with their vote on Prop 187 such that those who believed that the economy was suffering were also more likely to vote for Prop 187. What these data suggest, then, is that individuals may oppose immigration not necessarily because they have experienced financial hardship that they blame on immigrants, but because they associate immigration with

poor economic conditions. It also suggests that perceptions of economic competition can exist independent of objective competition (see Karapın 2002:154).

In his comparative study of British and German immigration politics, Roger Karapın (1999), acknowledges that socioeconomic conditions can create the conditions under which anti-immigration movements arise. However, he argues that socioeconomic conditions alone are not enough to foster mobilization against immigration and immigrants. According to Karapın,

The translation of economic grievances into political action is hindered by key features of immigration politics: the national politicians from the parties of government tend to maintain a consensus on liberal policies; the geographic concentration of immigrants limits the number of native citizens who feel threatened by immigration; and actors trying to raise issues that elites exclude from the political agenda have collective action problems. (1999:425)

Karapın goes on to suggest that the activity of political elites to draw attention to the issue of immigration is integral to the mobilization of anti-immigration forces.

Alvarez and Butterfield (2000) provide additional support for this argument in their study. According to their data, individuals voted for or against Proposition 187 largely independent of party affiliation. Instead, their vote was much more closely aligned to their gubernatorial vote. Voters who voted for or against Proposition 187 used “elite endorsements . . . as shortcuts or cues in their vote choice” (2000:172). They conclude that the politicization of Proposition 187 by gubernatorial and senatorial candidates eased the passage of Proposition 187. Karapın’s argument is further supported by Koopmans et al who demonstrate how the mobilization of the extreme right in Europe is determined in large part by the “policy positions of mainstream parties on issues pertaining to immigration and ethnic relations” (2005:182).

### Privatization of Security

Though civilian border patrols share many of the same complaints about immigration as other anti-immigration groups, their decision to carry out armed patrols at the border cannot be explained simply as an outcome of widespread anti-immigrant discourse. Recent scholarship on private security and militaries can provide insight into the growth of the Minuteman movement.

Scholars who study the privatization of security have argued both. Some argue that the privatization of security represents a challenge or weakening of the state (Van Creveld 1991), while others argue that privatization represents a reconfiguration of the state in an era of globalization and neoliberalism (Gill 2002; Singer 2003; Mandel 2002). The growth in private border security groups forms part of a broader pattern of privatization in global security, which includes the growth of private military firms (Singer 2003). Some scholars (Mandel 2002; Singer 2003) link the growth of private security forces—private militias, vigilante and rebel groups, to private security companies, gated communities, and private military corporations—with escalating feelings of insecurity throughout society. In an interview conducted in 1997, Eben Barlow, the founder of Executive Outcomes a private military firm *par excellence*, stated that the growth of private militaries paralleled the growth of private security firms aimed at “keeping the Third World away from suburban America” (Rubin 1997).

Within this context, Van Creveld (1991) posits that the nature of war and by extension the state, is changing. No longer tied to ideas of national defense, war will be waged on behalf of economic interest, as “individual profit and glory become legitimate objectives of war” (Van Creveld 1991: 97). Van Creveld thus predicts, “much of the day-

to-day burden of defending society against the threat of low-intensity conflict will be transferred to the booming security business; and indeed the time may come when the organizations that comprise that business will, like the condottieri of old, take over the state” (Van Creveld 1991:97). Van Creveld (1999) explains that the privatization of security is part of a broader pattern of privatization that heralds the decline of the state. Economic integration and technological advances that facilitate globalization processes, he argues, further contribute to the growth in power of non-state organizations (such as multi-national corporations, international trade organizations, etc.) at the expense of state authority. Though it remains to be seen what shape state activity and organization take in the future, the actions of the Minutemen at least point to an example of private actors working in support of some state institutions, particularly those having to do with its violence-wielding capacity.

Recent scholarship has challenged the idea that states are becoming weaker as the result of privatization. In his chapter on illegal political networks in Peru in the early 1900s, Nugent (1999) demonstrates that challenges to the state, rather than highlighting its limits and weaknesses, can actually form an integral part of establishing and reproducing state organization. Huggins (1998) argues that vigilantism can actually grant repressive states *greater* social control. In Latin America, vigilantes, death squads, and other paramilitary actors have provided “a less visible target for internal and international public opinion,” (Huggins 1998: 21) and can deflect public attention and outrage away from the state’s own violent activity. Furthermore, paramilitary organizations can accomplish national “security” goals without stretching national budgets. Paramilitary



activity can thus simultaneously limit the state's economic and political cost that would typically be associated with direct military action.

Paramilitaries have so effectively helped states achieve their internal political objectives that in some cases they have actually taken over or merged with local state authorities. In her article on the parastate in Barrancabermeja, Colombia, Lesley Gill (2009) reflects upon the ways that neoliberal economic restructuring paved the way for the merging of private paramilitary organizations and the state apparatus. Paramilitary violence targeted at labor leaders, human rights and student activists, and other opponents to neoliberalism, disrupted social networks, facilitated the exploitation of local labor by multinational corporations, and took place with the cooperation and support of the state apparatus. In the aftermath, paramilitaries have effectively taken over the operation of the state itself in Barrancabermeja, controlling political office, manipulating elections, and operating a number of legitimate businesses that blend the boundaries between state/non-state and legal/illegal.

The emergence and operation of private police and military organizations is not limited to developing nations. In the United States, the growth of Blackwater (now Xe), a private military firm, has gone hand in hand with the growth of the armed forces. What is more, Blackwater is a major proponent of selective government oversight that legitimates their activities and grants them further access to law making efforts that directly affect their operations (Scahill 2007). Although the rise of Blackwater as a military, economic, and political power in the United States and abroad is different than the rise of death squads in Brazil, Colombia, or elsewhere in Latin America, it nonetheless provides yet

another example of how private security forces can both operate independently from and as an extension of the state *at the same time*.

It may also be the case, as Aretxaga (2003), Lahav (2000), Huggins (1998), and Nugent (1994) suggest, that the privatization of security actually increases the ability of the state to regulate society. Particularly when it comes to immigration and commerce controls, the state has often used private corporations to expand its policing capabilities (Alvarez 2001; Lahav 2000; Zolberg 2006). Privatization may thus represent a reconfiguration of state authority rather than its diminution. The privatization of security and violence may reveal the way that state authority is an emergent process “grounded in violence that is performed and designed to generate loyalty, fear, and legitimacy from the neighborhood to the summit of the state,” as Hansen and Stepputat (2006:297) suggest. When we combine this perspective with Zolberg’s it becomes possible to consider how civilian border patrols may be engaged in a process that reconfigures the state’s ability to enact violence that is intimately tied to the nation building processes.

### Civilian Border Patrols

The limited literature on civilian border patrols seems to support the assertion that private actors are engaged in a discursive act to define national belonging in ways that can extend the reach and gaze of the state. Leo Chavez (2008) describes minutemen activity as an attempt to redefine the physical and symbolic contours of the nation-state. He argues that the minutemen use media spectacle and surveillance at the border to secure the privileges and purity of citizenship. According to Chavez, much of what civilian border patrols do is aimed at creating a media spectacle. As such, detaining

clandestine border crossers and stopping illicit cross border flows is secondary to their goal of gaining public attention and pressuring the government into adopting the groups' policy goals. In so doing, civilian border patrols seek to further codify the privileges of citizenship for select groups, and to further marginalize and exclude communities of color, particularly immigrant communities from Latin America.

Roxanne Doty (2007; 2009) describes this activity as “statecraft from below.” According to Doty, who draws on the work of securitization scholars, the minutemen are engaged in a politics of exceptionalism that seeks to define society along the lines of friend and enemy. For Doty, the minutemen are implicated in a broader effort conducted by state and non-state actors alike that marks migrants as the “enemy” and legitimizes the call for more anti-immigrant measures. Combined with official efforts including policing activities, fence building, and local and state legislation, civilian border patrols articulate a life and death struggle at the border that requires the build up of border security efforts at the border and the exclusion of migrants from U.S. society. Doty (2007) argues that civilian border patrols challenge the idea that states are the entities that make the “decision” about who is considered “enemy” and “friend.” Instead, she argues, securitization practices that define existential threats may be the result of “a plurality of decisions made from diverse locales,” (2007: 130) even those we might consider “radical” or “fringe.”

Doty’s argument effectively demonstrates how civilian border patrols challenge our ideas of state power and authority, as well as our understandings about how states create categories of belonging, institute policies of surveillance, policing, and war

making. Her research suggests that non-elites and non-state actors can participate in crafting official discourses of national belonging and national border security efforts.

As with Doty, James Walsh (2008) argues that the minutemen extend U.S. statecraft. In his article, Walsh compares civilian border patrols to community policing efforts. He argues that like community policing efforts, civilian border patrols highlight the ways that private citizens participate in the production and maintenance of social order. However, unlike community policing efforts that represent instances of the state “reaching down” into civil society, the minuteman “reach up” and align themselves with the “arms” of the state. Walsh explains that the minutemen represent a “form of popular mobilization and collective action that supplants and reinforces—rather than contests—state power” (Walsh 2008:28). He concludes that studying the minutemen reveals an inherent instability in the concept of the state: law and order enforcement, bordering, and surveillance, often viewed as central state pursuits, are adopted by agents that are not immediately recognizable as “state” agents. He argues that the minutemen thus “initiate, enhance, and extend many of the central properties of statecraft” (Walsh 2008:30) while at the same time highlighting its geographic and institutional dispersal.

Together these studies do not document the specific ways that civilian border patrol activity and activism comes to influence and impact official policy, nor do they explore the actual interactions between civilian border patrols and state policing agencies. These studies demonstrate that there is a link between civilian border patrol activity and official state border security efforts, however, we are left only with an understanding that minuteman activity results in official action, without any indication of how that influence

comes to be, and what are the specific connections between official actors and non-state agents.

However, I contend that the relationship between civilian border patrols and official policing agencies is much more ambiguous than the literature on the minutemen would suggest. Taken together, the existing literature on civilian border patrols challenges us to think about the ways that multiple actors, many of whom are not affiliated with the state, generate state power. However, the existing research on the minutemen may overemphasize their ability to influence state activities and legislative efforts. For example, though the Minutemen were able to gain some political support for their activities and enjoyed widespread publicity in 2005, their actions did not result in new immigration controls and regulations at the state or federal level. On the other hand, it is possible that the efforts of civilian border patrols may have resulted in the expansion of already extant federal efforts such as the replacement of older deteriorating fences and the installation of new fences at high cross-border traffic sites and the deployment of greater levels of policing personnel at the border (Chavez 2008).

Moreover, as these studies focus primarily on the impacts that the first spectacular Minuteman Project events had on the public, media, and state and federal legislators, they cannot tell us what has happened since 2005. This is particularly important since the minutemen have become less of a public spectacle, but continue to operate at the border. Does this mean that the minutemen have largely failed as a force in U.S. politics? Or have the minutemen shifted their tactics as well as their collective goals? If so, what are these goals and how do they seek to achieve them? Rather than contradict these studies, however, I wish to expand on their efforts by exploring the relationship between civilian

border patrols and the state from the perspective of civilian patrols. In so doing, I hope to examine how civilian border patrols draw upon the routines and rituals of immigration regulation that are increasingly enacted as border security practices.

This dissertation seeks to answer three key questions. First, how do we account for the emergence of civilian border patrols at this historical moment? Is it merely a response to high levels of immigration, degrading economic conditions, or the growing political power of non-white, non-black minorities, in particular Latinos? Second, why do civilian border patrols seek to achieve their goals by conducting armed border patrols instead of other, more typical anti-immigration activities? What does the decision by civilian patrols to focus their activism at the border say about the changing significance of the border, as well as the changing significance of border security within the anti-immigration discourse and within official immigration regulation efforts? Finally, I ask, what is the ongoing relationship between civilian border patrols and the state? Do the minutemen constitute a challenge to state authority or do their efforts truly extend the reach of the state?

To address these questions, I focus this study on the Minuteman Corps of California, one group of anti-immigration activists who pursue their economic, political, and cultural goals by exclusively conducting armed patrols at the U.S.-Mexico border in southern California. I find that civilian border patrols emerge during a time of tremendous real and perceived political, economic, and social upheaval that is tied to national and transnational neoliberal shifts. Neoliberal policies such as free trade agreements, structural adjustment programs that have cut or eliminated social spending in developing nations, and the creation of export processing zones have fueled migratory

flows of people and goods across the U.S.-Mexico border. The result has been an explosion in mostly non-white migration from Mexico, Latin America, and Asia since the 1980s.

At the same time, high demand for cheap foreign labor, welfare state retrenchment in the United States, and the expansion of the repressive state apparatus (Althusser 1971) at home and abroad have also resulted in broader feelings of economic and social instability within the United States. I suggest that the Minutemen blamed the effects of globalization and neoliberalism for their perceived loss of control and power at the expense of growing Latino, Asian, and Muslim communities. The Minutemen described these changes in ways that, like previous anti-immigration movements, combined race neutral codes of fairness with race-specific concerns (Jacobson 2008) that position Latinos as direct threats to the nation, defined as white, patriotic, and conservative. Not only do the Minutemen define themselves in opposition to immigrants, but they also define their own white, American identity in opposition to Latino rights advocates and government representatives in ways that articulate the proper roles of both citizens and the government.

I further argue that by joining the MCC, members discovered a way to counter these feelings of powerlessness. Not only did the MCC provide members with a tactics that allowed them to “do something” about the problems associated with immigration—namely border patrol operations provided members with the potential for actually stopping dangerous individuals from successfully entering the United States—but it also allowed members to create a safe space in what was viewed as a dangerous landscape that extended from the border to their communities. Members could talk to and spend

time with like-minded individuals who would listen to their complaints without fear of being called racist. Additionally, MCC activities allowed members to “serve their country” in fun and exciting ways by offering the potential for danger in an organized and “safe” manner.

Finally, I find that the Minutemen are a direct outgrowth of official policing efforts. Not only do the Minutemen employ border security tactics that were originally official policing innovations, but they legitimize their activities by evoking official border policing justifications—i.e., the border is an out of control and dangerous place, patrolling the border defends against foreign invasion, and the militarization of the border is the most effective way to regulate migratory flows. However, in carrying out their activities, the Minutemen must contend with their ambivalent feelings toward the government. That is civilian border patrols that seek to embarrass, pressure, and influence the government, police, and to a lesser extent, the military, must also rely on a cooperative state to carry out their organizational goals. Lacking police powers, such as the power to arrest, prosecute, imprison, punish, and deport clandestine border patrols, civilian border patrols must rely on a responsive state that acts upon the Minutemen’s observations. This contradictory relationship not only created tensions, but also resulted in the Minutemen’s adoption of tactics that both professionalized and radicalized them. The Minutemen thus represent an instance of what Kil and Menjivar (2006) have called the “brutalization of the public.”



### Methodology

I first became interested in studying the Minutemen in 2005, when I began hearing sensational accounts of the April Minuteman Project protest event. In that year, members of the Minuteman Project and Civil Homeland Defense (the MCDC's predecessor) gathered at the border in Arizona to both protest what they viewed as government inaction on border security and to patrol the border. The protesters were often described as gun wielding vigilantes that sat around in lawn chairs, highlighting their potential for violence while simultaneously dismissing them as ineffective and misguided. Over the course of the next year, minuteman groups began organizing throughout the United States, including in Maryland and Virginia. In 2006 the Virginia chapter of the Minuteman Civil Defense Corps began surveillance activities at a day laborer hiring site in Herndon, Virginia. Around the same time, a Maryland chapter formed and began dedicating its efforts at targeting Casa De Maryland, an immigrant rights organization that formed in 1985 to serve the needs of Central American refugees in the DC metropolitan region.

I first contacted the head of the Virginia chapter in 2006. He informed me that the group was quickly losing steam and that I should contact the Maryland chapter. I followed his advice and the Maryland spokesperson told me to attend a symposium on immigration that they were hosting in Germantown, a DC exurb.

Speakers from the Center For Immigration Studies (CIS), a conservative think-tank, and the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) gave talks at the event about the perils of "legal" and "illegal" immigration as well as some of the contemporary efforts to reform U.S. immigration laws. At the end of the meeting, a white

man in his mid- to late-fifties, dressed in blue jeans and a white t-shirt with an emblem of a bald eagle in front of a large U.S. flag, stood up in front of the room and urged the audience members to “muster” at the border. He explained that calling your representative and calling ICE were all well and good but to really do something you needed to go to the border where “it was all happening.” He explained that the border was where the “real fight” was taking place.

Later that same year, I contacted Carl Braun who was the head of the California chapter of the MCDC at the time. He informed me that the Minuteman Project and Minuteman Civil Defense Corps had split because of a philosophical difference about how best to advocate for stricter border controls and immigration regulation. Jim Gilchrist of the Minuteman Project believed that they should focus their attention on pressuring lawmakers to enforce laws against hiring undocumented migrants. Chris Simcox of the MCDC believed that patrolling the border was more important. From my conversation with the California representative and my experience in Maryland it became clear that my research would have to focus on the civilian border patrols at the Mexico-U.S. border.

My decision to focus exclusively on the border patrol activities of the Minutemen was two-fold. First, the tactical innovation of conducting civilian border patrols was the minutemen’s calling card. As the preceding review explains, there is a broad literature on anti-immigration activities that seek to influence public policy. There is less that examines private border patrols, and none that is based on extensive ethnographic field research during Minuteman activities. Second, studying minuteman activity at the border would provide important insights into their relationship with state agencies, specifically

with official border policing agencies. Though investigating the actions of the Minutemen at locations removed from the border would provide important insights into the ideology of the border and anti-immigration activism away from the border, it would likely duplicate previous research. Moreover, though some minuteman activity consisted of surveillance activity away from the border, the bulk of their activism was directed at influencing legislation and closing day laborer centers. In short, away from the border the minutemen function largely as an oppositional group that seeks legislative remedies for social problems. I believed that studying the minutemen at the border would provide a deeper understanding of the interaction between the minutemen and official policing agencies. This is particularly important during a period when the privatization of security is rapidly expanding (Mandel 2002; Palafox 2000).

Over a two and one-half year period from April 2007 to October 2009, I participated in four month-long and six weekend MCC musters—what MCC members called their monthly gatherings—and countless border patrol “operations.” I first visited Camp Vigilance in April 2007 to conduct preliminary research. At first, MCC leaders limited my participation in border ops to daytime operations. They informed me that if I wanted to participate in night ops that I would have to join the MCDC and submit to a criminal background check and be interviewed as part of a vetting process. Unwilling to join the organization, I began designing a study that would make up for the limited access that I would have to Minuteman activities. When I returned a year later to begin my formal field research, MCC leaders removed all restrictions and allowed me to participate in all of their operations and activities. I learned that they had previously restricted me to daytime operations because they did not know me and that they wanted to make sure that

I was “safe,” and that I would also not be in danger of being harmed. They explained that they wanted to make sure that I could be trusted to protect their members’ safety and that I would not endanger anyone including myself.

From April 2008 forward, MCC leaders and members granted me virtually unfettered access to their operations and members. During MCC musters I camped in a tent that I owned except in October 2009 when I rented an RV from the Minutemen for the purposes of conducting private interviews. I paid to stay at Camp Vigilance and I also paid for my meals. During these musters I participated in virtually all Minuteman activities including border watch operations, which is where the bulk of my research was conducted.

Border crossing is often a matter of life and death (Cornelius 2001; Eschbach, Hagan, Rodriguez, Hernandez-leon, and Bailey 1999; Ramos and Cordero 2005). As I discuss in later chapters, by adopting many of the same border policing techniques that official policing agencies use, the Minutemen are potentially contributing to a security regime that purposefully pushes migrants into areas where they are increasingly in danger of suffering harm and death. Though I never witnessed any Minuteman who was threatened or in immediate danger, and I believed the likelihood to be slim, I had to acknowledge the potential dangers to my Minuteman companions. To balance my desire to protect both my participants and migrants, I limited my participation in border watch operations to those “ops” that were purely observational. I did not participate in tracking activities that I viewed as active attempts by MCC volunteers to apprehend migrants.

During operations in which I participated, I tried to accompany at least two MCC volunteers. This, I reasoned, would allow me to participant-observe without having to

report alleged unauthorized border crossings. There was only one instance where I had to alert one of my MCC companions to the presence of someone who was neither Minuteman nor Border Patrol agent.

In addition to participating in border watch operations, I also shared meals, participated in twice-daily briefings, and helped with various home improvement projects at Camp Vigilance. I also helped the Minutemen erect two radio repeater towers on property owned by local residents. Though I typically participated in operations, I also elected to spend some operations back at camp to observe what members did when they were not on operations. Though I did not operate the communications equipment in the Comm. Center, I did spend some operations in the Comm. Center talking with and observing the activities of whoever was “working comms” at the time.

Very early in my time at Camp Vigilance I began writing notes in public. I wanted the members of the MCC to quickly become used to seeing me writing so that I could spend more time in public and less time writing in my tent. At first, I found members looking at me strangely, peeking over my shoulder, and the like. Over time, however, they grew used to it, and though they would occasionally make reference to my writing, it never seemed to be a problem.

While on daytime operations I could write extensive notes. However, most operations took place at night and it was impossible to write long field notes. Instead, I would often write one or two word notes on the back of my notebook, on my hand, or any thing that I could get my hands on at the time. Upon returning from operations I would use these brief notes to write more detailed field notes in my tent. By 11:00 PM, the temperature outside would usually drop below freezing which made writing notes in my

tent very difficult. I purchased fingerless gloves to help prolong my note-writing abilities, but usually I would have to give up writing and continue in the morning. Though I believe that my notes are largely accurate, the conditions under which I wrote them almost inevitably will result in some misrecollection. I have tried to account for this shortcoming by drawing on notes for which there are multiple examples or where I have support from recorded interviews. Of course this has the potential of overemphasizing consistency, so, where relevant, I acknowledge any inconsistencies in Minuteman activity or thought.

These actions and interactions provided a rich set of observations and conversations on which the bulk of this dissertation is based. I supplemented my ethnographic research with formal interviews that I conducted with fifteen MCC members and a Border Patrol spokesperson. Most of the interviews were conducted in October 2009 at Camp Vigilance. The purpose of the interviews was to provide greater context for my ethnographic data, gain a deeper understanding of the reasons that members gave for joining, what they were trying to accomplish individually and as a group, and their experiences with the Border Patrol and its agents as well as local residents, especially the Native American population.

The interviews provided important context for my observations especially the motivations and levels of interaction between members and the Border Patrol. The interviews were less helpful with understanding the interactions between members and the local community. In every case, the interviewees had little to no interaction with local residents except as customers at local shops and at the casino. Though some members expressed distrust of the local Native American population—they believed they were in

league with drug and people smugglers—they did not have any experiences with the local Native American population on which to base their opinions.

Originally, I had planned on conducting twenty to thirty interviews with members and leaders who often participated in Minuteman musters as well as Border Patrol agents. However, I found that it was impossible to conduct confidential interviews with members without having an RV or some other enclosed shelter that offered similar levels of space and privacy. I realized the depth of this dilemma when, during my first interview, my participant was interrupted mid-sentence by another Minuteman (whose RV he was sharing), at the exact time that my interview participant was describing his disapproval over some of the RV owner's past actions.

Luckily, the Minutemen had an RV that one of its members owned and that they were willing to rent to me for the month of October. Unfortunately, by then very few members participated in month-long musters and when they did they restricted their activity to the weekends. Though many members expressed that they would participate in an interview, few actually had the time to sit down with me. Though most of my interviews were conducted in the RV, I supplemented these with a small number of phone interviews. In total, I ended up conducting interviews with 15 individuals including three members of the leadership group, and one Border Patrol representative.

Interviewing Border Patrol agents proved impossible. The Border Patrol media relations office allowed me to interview one of their representatives, but they would not provide access to other agents. They informed me that if I wanted to interview Border Patrol agents that I would have to contact the agents directly. I encountered very few

Border Patrol agents in the field. Typically, our interactions were limited to a wave as their vehicles passed.

I focused my research on the MCC and California operations for a number of reasons. First, as a member of the MCDC, the MCC offered routine and organized musters and operations, which made it easier for me to schedule research trips and participate in MCC activities. The MCC drew upon a relatively large membership (roughly 1,600 when I began the project) compared to other California civilian border patrol organizations that numbered in the tens. The size of the MCC provided me access to individuals with a broad array of opinions and from a number of different occupational, educational, age, gender, and geographic backgrounds.

Furthermore, California has long been the epicenter of wide scale documented and undocumented migration from Latin America, and Mexico in particular. Similarly, California has been a hotbed of anti-immigrant activism, especially since the 1990s. As I will discuss in later chapters, many members joined the MCC because of their connection with other anti-immigrant groups in California. I also decided to focus my study on California because from the outset they had a much closer working relationship with the Border Patrol than did the Arizona groups. From the outset, the organizers of MCDC musters in Arizona organized their efforts not only without the input of the Border Patrol, but they actively courted official opposition as a way of creating a media spectacle and attracting new members (Chapter Two). Moreover, the Border Patrol in Arizona had far fewer agents working in the areas where Minutemen were conducting civilian patrols, which meant that they were less responsive to Minuteman spotters. Finally, the Arizona



patrols took place at least forty miles away from the border in locations where few people lived.

In contrast, the California chapter viewed the Border Patrol as both a potential threat and ally. Working with the California chapter, therefore, offered me an opportunity to see how closely the Minutemen worked with official policing agencies. Moreover, the MCC operated in an area where at least two other civilian border patrol organizations also operated, which would further provide me with the opportunity to place the MCC's actions within the context of the minuteman movement as a whole. Unlike the situation in Arizona, the Border Patrol maintained a very large presence in eastern San Diego County and was very responsive to MCC calls. For these reasons I chose to focus my research on California and the MCC exclusively. Had I the time and the resources, I would have conducted a comparative study between Minuteman operations in California and Arizona.

I also chose to focus my study on the Minuteman Corps of California because as a chapter of the Minuteman Civil Defense Corps, the MCC was part of a national organization dedicated to combatting undocumented immigration. The MCDC participated in the widely publicized 2005 protest event that propelled the minuteman movement onto the national stage. Though MCC members participated in armed patrols, they did not (at least openly) promote overtly violent actions against immigrants, nor did they seek to apprehend migrants, instead limiting their activity to observing and reporting suspected clandestine border crossings. MCC members had standing policies that prohibited the use of assault rifles and shotguns as well as full camouflage. In short, the MCC appeared to be a moderate voice in the minuteman movement. Studying a relatively

moderate minuteman organization was important to me because I did not want to create a caricature of civilian border patrols. I did not want to present the minutemen as a crazy vigilante group. Rather, I wished to understand them as real human beings. There was also a safety concern that I had to consider. I therefore chose the Minutemen because they maintained written codes of conduct that required their members to refrain from racist speech and violent action directed at immigrants. Studying the MCC provided me with the opportunity to assess how members interpreted their actions within the bounds of these rules and regulations.

### Outline of the Dissertation

I begin in Chapter Two with a historical analysis of anti-immigration activity and the changing significance of the border. Chapter Two explores the changing dimensions of popular U.S. discourse about immigrants and immigration. I explore how definitions of national belonging developed in tandem with changing definitions of which foreign populations were and were not the most desirable, and changing notions of race. From the first immigration regulations during the colonial period to the immigration restrictions of 1924, immigrants were simultaneously integral to the development of the American nation and a potentially dangerous source of internal division and discord. I argue that national debates over immigration took place concurrently with constructions of racial difference, often drawing upon and expanding definitions of white supremacy. Contemporary immigration controls build upon old narratives of immigration and move in new directions. Specifically, official immigration efforts are increasingly targeted at policing efforts at work sites throughout the United States and at the border. I suggest that

this shift partly explains why the Minutemen emerged during the first decade of the 21st century.

Chapter Three explores why MCC members opposed immigration. I show how MCC volunteers drew upon racialized constructions of immigrants that defined them as poor and dependent upon government aid, criminals and terrorists, and as a cultural/racial threat to the nation. I find that the ideas that the Minutemen possess about immigration do not differ much from other recent anti-immigration efforts. However, where the Minutemen do differ is in the way that they project the disorders associated with immigration onto the border. In so doing, the Minutemen conflate immigrants with codes of racial otherness regardless of immigration status and national origin. Patrolling the border, therefore, become a logical way for members to counter their feelings of powerlessness.

Chapter Four explores in greater detail the developing relationship between the Minutemen and official border policing agencies. I describe two events that illustrate the contradictory relationship between the Minutemen and the state. I show how the minutemen deal with the breakdowns in communication between themselves and the Border Patrol. I suggest that the Minutemen seek to overcome the barrier between themselves and official agencies by expanding their capacity to enact violence. This creates a conflict for the Minutemen as they at once seek to maintain their autonomy vis-à-vis the state, but also seek to enhance their ability to act *like* the state. In so doing I reveal the way that the Minutemen define success not as their ability to effectively deter undocumented immigration, but on gaining approval from official sources for their actions.

I conclude by reviewing my findings through the lens of Eric Wolf's (Wolf 1990) four-part definition of power. I suggest that the Minutemen attempt to access all four dimensions of power by empowering its members to act out their political goals, extend its members' ability to influence the actions of others, namely migrants, politicians, the media, and the public, by accessing organizational power and transforming a disordered border landscape into something that appeared to be controllable. In so doing, the Minutemen attempted to access the coercive power of the state in ways that further defined state authority as primarily coercive, punitive and violent.

## CHAPTER 2

### HISTORY OF IMMIGRATION AND BORDER REGULATION

The border shared by the United States and Mexico has attracted more attention in recent years than ever before. As globalization makes boundaries more permeable to capital and trade, states are embarking on policing efforts that make borders less permeable to human traffic. Nowhere is this more apparent than along the United States southern border with Mexico. Today hundreds of miles of fencing, thousands of Border Patrol agents, unmanned surveillance drones that are also used in military operations in Afghanistan, and the National Guard patrol an increasingly militarized border. The development of the contemporary border security regime did not happen overnight. Rather it is the culmination of nearly two centuries of immigration regulation, growing state power, especially as it relates to the border and border policing, “and high levels of public acceptance” of that power (Nevins 2002:13). How did the border come to occupy such a large place in “Americans’ geographical imagination” (Nevins 2002:13)? What were the legal and cultural processes that impelled the contemporary wave of anti-immigrant anxiety that gave rise to the minuteman movement?

#### Early Immigration Regulation (Pre-Independence to the 1850s)

Early U.S. immigration regulation took place absent of concerns over physical borders and was performed by the states. Indeed, the U.S. constitution prohibited the

federal government from restricting immigration until 1808 and it was not until 1847 that the federal government passed the first national immigration regulations.

The absence of federal immigration regulations prior to 1847 does not reflect a lack of concern by early U.S. Americans. Rather, since its inception the United States has attempted at once to attract as well as control the flow of foreign labor. One of the major grievances that impelled the Revolutionary War was Britain's practice of restricting the emigration of productive, able-bodied subjects to the North American colonies, while forcefully exporting the poor and those convicted of criminal acts. As early as the 17th century, American colonists responded to this practice by instituting measures designed to prevent criminals and paupers from entering their territories via ship or on land via neighboring colonies (Klebaner 1958; Zolberg 2006). As the colonies achieved independence from Britain the focus of their immigration control efforts continued to revolve around trying to anticipate the likelihood that a foreign traveler would become a public charge. Port cities were primarily concerned with the financial burden that poor and ill foreigners represented. Port of entry states sought to assess fines and taxes to pay for the maintenance of poor houses, asylums, and hospitals that cared for immigrants (Klebaner 1958; Neuman 1993; Zolberg 2006). Throughout the 1700s and early-1800s port cities such as New York, Boston, and Philadelphia sought to insure against the chance that foreign passengers might become public charges by giving ship masters the choice of "removing" indigent passengers or "giving a bond to indemnify the public against the possible expense of supporting him" (Klebaner 1958:270). Officials found it extremely difficult to collect on these bonds, however. Officials often found it impossible to determine which bond was responsible for paying for the cost associated with an

individual that was cared for at an almshouse, asylum, or hospital. Immigrants often could not remember the name of the ship upon which they arrived. In other instances, getting the correct names of individual passengers proved difficult for regulatory agents especially when it was impossible to prove their identity (Klebaner 1958:277).

In response to growing concern about the public burden that poor immigrants posed to port cities, states sought remedy primarily by requiring ships masters to pay a per passenger fee to cover the costs associated with caring for poor and sick immigrants. This “head tax,” like the bond before it, was mainly an “insurance premium rather than . . . an impost” (Klebaner 1958:285). Between 1847 and 1876, for example, New York City commissioners collected more than \$11 million through the imposition of head taxes. Interestingly, the tax imposed in 1847 was collected from *healthy* immigrants. This money went to state run institutions and those run by Irish and German aid societies (Klebaner 1958:274-275). In each case, ship captains were required to pay the per passenger fee, thus raising the fare for passage. Ideally bonds and head taxes would thus limit the negative financial impact that poor passengers had on state and municipal coffers as well as make it economically impossible for the poorest individuals to embark on European ships destined for the United States (Klebaner 1958; Zolberg 2006).

Nevertheless, non-uniform immigration policies as well as fierce competition among states to attract shipping income provided opportunities for shipmasters to avoid paying bond or tax. Smugglers often landed passengers outside of major ports or landed at ports that levied a lower per passenger fee. Such practices were often illegal and carried a hefty fine, such as the \$500 fine for landing passengers within 50 miles of New York City. Nevertheless the lack of an effective regulatory system meant that smugglers

often successfully skirted the law. Additionally, competition amongst states for foreign labor often resulted in constantly shifting head tax rates, even commutation of head tax and bond requirements in some cases (Klebaner 1958:273).

State specific immigration regulations formed the foundation upon which nascent federal policy was based. While the federal government left much of early immigration regulation to the states, Congress instead trained its focus on uniform naturalization legislation that repeatedly stated who was eligible to become a fully integrated member of American society and who was not. The Naturalization Law of 1790 restricted naturalization to immigrants who were “free white persons” of “good moral character.” It excluded free blacks, indentured servants and Native Americans. According to Aristide Zolberg (2006), the 1790 law sought to address concerns over the threat to national homogeneity that immigrants posed by linking nation to territory. “Birth on American ‘soil,’ standing for social as much as physical milieu,” he argues, “afforded assurance of civic virtue” (Zolberg 2006:81). For foreigners who did not “naturally “possess such traits naturalization afforded immigrants with the opportunity to obtain them. Naturalization was therefore a process that began, rather than ended, by becoming an officially recognized citizen.

As immigration increased and as the United States became a colonial power in its own right, concerns over immigration, specifically over the threat that liberal naturalization processes would have on the security and homogeneity of the nation resulted in constant tinkering with naturalization laws throughout the late-18th and 19th centuries. As political instability swept throughout Europe and threatened to impact a juvenile American political system American nativism emerged as a response. In 1795



Congress extended the residency requirement for naturalization to five years and required immigrants to declare their intent to become a citizen three years in advance. Three years later Congress passed the Alien and Sedition Acts, which further raised the residency requirement to fourteen years and required all present and future “aliens” to register with the state thus instituting for the first time national immigrant surveillance. Additionally, the Acts granted the President the authority to arrest or deport “dangerous” immigrants and, during times of war, any male immigrant over the age of fourteen. These Acts, based on earlier rights vested in the colonies and states, established the ability of the federal state to coerce immigrants to leave the country based on arbitrary criteria. Moreover, they reflected a growing desire on the part of political leaders to “purify the national character by isolating all aliens from American society and from each other,” (Smith 1956:52) and by limiting their ability to exert political influence.

In the North as in the South, the importation of labor, its control, and the challenges to social order that such processes entailed became primary concerns for social commentators from the colonial period through the post-Civil War era. Prior to 1830, immigration played an important but limited role in U.S. population growth. Scholars disagree on the impact that immigration had on population growth during this period, however. Hans-Jurgen Grabbe (1989:196) estimates that 366,500 individuals immigrated to the United States between 1783 and 1819 constituting roughly ten percent of population growth during this period. Alternatively, Henry A. Gemery (1984:305) estimates that roughly 600,000 individuals immigrated to America from 1700-1789 and 1.3 million between 1790 and 1820. However, as Farley Grubb’s research on German immigration to Pennsylvania suggests, immigration may have had a greater impact on

immigration growth at some locations in the time periods immediately before and after American independence. Although roughly 70 percent of immigrants to the colonies were British subjects, according to Grubb, German immigrants represented nearly a third of the population of the middle colonies between 1730 and 1760. By 1760 individuals of German descent represented over half of Pennsylvania's population (1990:417). According to Susan E. Klepp, from 1690 to 1759 immigration was the primary source of population growth in Philadelphia and remained a significant source of population growth through the remainder of the eighteenth century and on into the nineteenth.

Nevertheless, during the colonial period as well as the decades that immediately followed public officials sought to regulate the flow of immigration and discipline the foreign work force. Despite their small numbers, immigrants were much more likely to rely on public assistance (Zolberg 2006:114-115). In 1825, for example, immigrants in New York constituted 4.6 percent of the population yet comprised 40 percent of almshouse admissions (Zolberg 2006:115). At least until the middle of the nineteenth centuries those considered undesirable were the poor, ill, and insane. Opposition to immigration typically referenced poverty, disease, religion, and politics but not race.

Despite the decentralized and nonlinear character of early immigration regulation it formed a nominal form of national immigration control. This "immigration regime" (Zolberg 2006) was not designed to prevent most immigrants from entering. Instead it sought to attract certain kinds of acceptable laborers as part of a broader effort to support and expand foreign shipping. Even those classes of individuals such as the indigent, infirm, ill, and criminal, though officially discouraged from entering in many cases, were not fully excluded. In

some cases, eastern cities actually created extensive systems of public institutions designed to care for the immigrant poor and sick (Klebaner 1958). In New York, an 1847 law established an Emigration Commission that actually paid to transport indigent migrants to locations where their labor was in high demand such as the western territories and states (Klebaner 1958:275). The lack of any real enforcement efforts meant that even unwanted foreign migrants were often able to enter and live in the United States. In short, immigrants were viewed primarily as a necessary source of labor and a byproduct of the shipping industry. In the minds of most Americans, especially the merchant class, the economic boost that immigration and foreign trade provided vastly outweighed the negative impacts immigration might potentially have on American cities. Nonetheless, even though state and later federal regulation tended to encourage migration of particular classes of people, these regulations were also designed to prevent the passage and full integration of unwanted classes of immigrants. Taken together, the uneven regulation of immigration from the period preceding American Independence up through the passage of the first federal immigration controls reflected a deliberate effort to erect an internal boundary

not simply between natives and aliens . . . but somewhat more ambiguously between 'Americans' and 'Un-Americans.' All natives were not equally American, nor all aliens equally un-American: the boundary builders placed on the one side well-behaved native-born and immigrants, and on the other disturbing aliens and Americans who adopted alien ways. (Zolberg 2006: 95)

Westward Expansion, The Frontier  
And Changing Notions Of Race

In 1890, the U.S. Census declared that the era of the American frontier had come to an end. Three years later Frederick Jackson Turner addressed the American Historical Association at the Chicago Columbian Exposition. There he delivered his seminal lecture, *The Significance of the Frontier in American History* (Turner 1961). As the frontier slipped from view, as Native Americans were “pacified,” as the federalization of the United States Government expanded, as agricultural production increasingly gave way to urbanization and industrialization, and as social and territorial boundaries became increasingly rigid, Turner highlighted the importance of the frontier in shaping an American national identity.<sup>2</sup> In his now famous speech Turner stated that a unique American identity, one differentiated from its European foundations, emerged from the interaction between civilization and “savagery” at the frontier. For Turner the frontier was not only uniquely American, but crucial in the formation of an American identity.

Rejecting the widely held belief that American institutions were rooted in Europe, Turner argued that the frontier was at the heart of a developing American “character.” The frontier represented an ever changing and fluid site of cultural exchange and rebirth (Turner 1961:38). Along the frontier, white settlers encountered native inhabitants, appropriated their survival strategies, tamed the wild, and erected a society that was neither European nor “savage” but a civilization altogether distinct. In particular, the frontier helped to transform new immigrants into full members of the American nation,

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<sup>2</sup> As Patricia Limerick has noted, the frontier “is an unsubtle concept in a subtle world” (1987:25). In my discussion of the frontier, I hope to avoid reifying the concept as an identifiable space or period. Rather, I define the frontier as primarily an ideological device designed at times to define American exceptionalism (e.g. Turner 1961), and at others as a stand in for the American West.

and America into a nation of immigrants. Turner proudly proclaimed that “The frontier promoted the formation of a composite nationality for the American people” (Turner 1961:51). “Taming” the wilds of the frontier resulted not in a replication of European society on the edges of chaos, but a new society replete with new opportunities and new ways of life that set America apart from its European forbears. At the frontier “immigrants were Americanized, liberated, and fused into a mixed race, English neither in nationality nor characteristics” (Turner 1961:51). For Turner and many others, the frontier became a powerful metaphor designed to assuage anxieties about the rapid transformation of American life due to industrialization, mass migration, and the end of slavery.

Whereas Turner emphasized its peaceful nature, U.S. territorial expansion was hardly a peaceful enterprise. Vast territorial expansion, rapid population growth, and high levels of immigration throughout the 18th and 19th centuries “had brought together not only diverse geographical regions but culturally and linguistically different populations as well, a fact that complicated the question of ‘Americanness’” (Huhndorf 2001:21). Racial and class strife further complicated the construction of a homogenous national identity. At the time of Turner’s speech, manufacturing had increased and the value of manufactured goods skyrocketed. Between 1815 and 1860 American manufacturing had outpaced both Germany and Britain combined, and what was once a primarily agricultural labor force had transformed into a labor force that was equally engaged in the manufacturing, transportation, and utility industries (Takaki 1993:225). The “market revolution,” to use Ronald Takaki’s terminology, was impelled by the creation of a segmented labor force in the South and North, the disciplining of poor and laboring white

and black Americans, and western territorial expansion. The rapid expansion of the U.S. economy and territory was based on the creation and enforcement of internal boundaries and eventually resulted in the erection of external borders.

According to Ronald Takaki's (2000) excellent historical analysis, Native Americans and African "savages" became an early analog for darkness, danger, and vice for the English Protestants that colonized America. Preoccupied by the depravities that plagued their own societies, British settlers projected savagery onto native populations to ease their anxieties about their own immoral proclivities. In the Indians, Europeans saw a people who embodied the savage impulses, such as irrationality, sexual promiscuity, and paganism, which they sought to subdue within themselves (Takaki 2000, 12). Indeed, American Indians became an analog for all forms of "savage" behavior. American patriots accused King George III of being more savage than "the naked and untutored Indian" (Takaki 2000:10). By the end of the 19th century, poor children, freedmen, and laborers in northeastern cities were also accused of being like native savages (Slotkin 1985).

The savagery that Native Americans and their non-white bodies represented justified "the arrogant notion that these English settlers would make better use of what they saw as undeveloped 'wilderness' than 'wild savages' who were the present occupants" (Feagin 1997:16). Although indigenous groups inhabited the New World, Alexis de Tocqueville described it as "one great desert." He reasoned that because "it is by agricultural labor that man possesses the soil," Native Americans "occupied without possessing" the lands of North America (Tocqueville 1876:29). Occupied solely by "wandering tribes, who had no thought of profiting by the natural riches of the soil"

endless, vacant lands provided the necessary conditions under which democracy could thrive (Tocqueville 1876:372). For Tocqueville, American imperial expansion was not only an inevitable march of civilized progress, but also integral to the development of the American way of life. Moreover, American national identity was intimately tied to its expanding territory and the elimination of Native Americans from the physical landscape.

At this very time, thirteen millions of civilized Europeans are peaceably spreading over those fertile plains... Three or four thousand soldiers drive before them the wandering races of the aborigines; these are followed by the pioneers, who pierce the woods, scare off the beasts of prey, explore the courses of the inland streams, and make ready the triumphal march of civilization across the desert. (Tocqueville 1876:373)

For Tocqueville the expansion of American territory was a necessary and inevitable result of the global spread of democracy and civilization.

Tocqueville's view of American territory, and the place of Native Americans within it, was shared by most of his white American contemporaries and had informed the colonization of North America since the seventeenth century. The way that diseases such as smallpox decimated Native American populations further supported white settlers' views that American Indians would naturally fade from the American landscape. In the eyes of Cotton Mather, a New England minister, disease was sent by God to rid the colonies "of those pernicious creatures to make room for better growth" (Kraut 1994:20). Indeed, many white Americans believed that Indians would naturally "diminish" as whites multiplied (Takaki 2000). Those that did not die from disease would have to be forcibly removed or converted to civilization. Tocqueville opined that Native Americans were so ill disposed to survive the transition from savagery to civilization that "force would have to be employed to compel [Indians] to live" (1876:295). Normative ideals

about civilization and savagery justified over two centuries of deliberate attempts to either reform or remove indigenous populations from the American cultural and physical landscapes.

Despite their association with non-white difference, however, Native Americans were not viewed as a threat by laboring whites and thus were not used as a “foil” against which white laborers constructed their racial identities (Roediger 2007:22). Instead, white laborers constructed a cohesive racial identity in contrast to black slaves (Roediger 2007).

The institution of African slavery was a vital component to the emergence of the United States as a colonial power and to a white American identity. The first Africans were brought to the British colonies as indentured servants. Like their white counterparts, black indentured servants were contracted to work for their masters for a period of time in exchange for their passage, food, clothing, and housing (Takaki 2000; Wolf 1982). According to Eric Wolf, “Indentured servitude differed little from slavery. Indentured servants were often bought and sold while contractually bound; they were harshly punished for breaches of discipline, and many did not outlive the period of their bondage” (Wolf 1982:202). In the 17th century, white immigrant servants, angry at the lack of economic opportunity in the colonies, threatened violence against southern land holding elites. During the 1660s, as white servants increasingly displayed “discontent and rebelliousness,” southern colonies took legal steps to normalize black slavery (Takaki 1993:65). Slavery transformed individuals who were viewed as foreign “savages” into an exploited labor force that “could be more effectively controlled by state power than white servants, for they could be denied certain rights based on the color of their skin” (Takaki 1993:66). Africans became the preferred choice for slave labor for Southern plantation



owner because, unlike white servants who could elicit support from other whites, Africans in America had few allies from which to draw support (Takaki 1993).

Significantly, skin color became an indelible symbol of American slavery and Southern labor. Racial difference, conceived in many ways as difference on the order of species by eighteenth century commentators, served to justify the “inequitable allocation of political and social rights, while still upholding the doctrine of ‘the rights of man’” (Omi and Winant 1994:64). Slavery, and to a large degree labor (especially in the South), came to be associated exclusively with blackness and codes of dependence (Roediger 2007)

Not only did slavery codify white supremacy by restricting slavery to non-whites, it also served to consolidate the power of large plantation owners vis-à-vis poor whites. Slaveholders, especially those Southern elites that possessed large numbers of enslaved laborers, distrusted poor whites and viewed them as a potential threat to the social and economic order of the South. According to Eugene Genovese (1974) many slaveholders feared that non-slaveholding whites would foment slave rebellion not out of a moral stance against slavery, but because of their hatred for the planter class. Non-slaveholding whites occupied a relatively weak political economic position vis-à-vis slaveholding elites. The availability of cheap black labor depressed wages in the South compared to the North and Midwest. White laborers had to work for less and work longer hours to compete with slave labor in the South. According to William Julius Wilson (1980:27), the prevalence of slave labor in a variety of labor markets also severely curtailed the ability of white laborers to form bonds of solidarity strong enough to pursue collective political and economic goals.

The ability of slaveholding elites to institute ideological and legal controls over the labor market further prevented bonds of solidarity from forming amongst white laborers or between them and black laborers. Legal and social measures that were designed to maintain the separation between laboring blacks and whites depended in part on degrading and demonizing both black slaves and poor whites. Slaves

had to feel that African ancestry tainted them, that their color was a badge of degradation. In the country they were to show respect for even their master's nonslaveholding neighbors; in the towns they were to give way on the streets to the most wretched white man. The line between the races must never be crossed, for familiarity caused slaves to forget their lowly station and to become 'impudent.' (Stampp 1956:145).

The degradation of black slaves relied in part on the simultaneous construction of white laborers as threats to Southern society. Poor whites, unlike wealthy elites, were described as prone to fits of intense violence both against enslaved blacks and the white planter class. Accordingly, state legislatures enacted laws, and local communities enforced customary expectations, such as restrictive gun laws that prohibited poor whites from owning guns, that were designed to make "excessive" violence against slaves illegal. These restrictions were not designed to protect the rights of slaves; rather they protected the property of the master class. Such measures further sought to reduce the ability of poor whites to threaten the social position of the master class and the racial bounds that were so carefully crafted to serve its interest (Genovese 1974:33).

Prohibitions against mutual interaction, interracial marriage, and the restriction of slave status to non-whites, further "codified," in law and practice, a system of white supremacy (Genovese 1974:31) in ways that omitted the desire or input of laboring whites (Wilson 1980:27). Customary beliefs about the relationship between blacks and

whites were so entrenched that many southerners believed that “No white men will ever be found on familiar terms with negroes, who are not either of an abandoned or worthless character or are abolitionists” (Stampp 1956:150).

In sum, slavery created sharp divisions between white and black laborers and between the classes. Slavery created a racialized labor force that had limited access to institutions that regulated the normative expectations placed on the actions of both whites and blacks. Controlled by the white planter class to serve its own interest, the avenues for routinized advocacy on the part of blacks was often restricted to bolstering class divisions. Racial stratification and the relationship between race and labor became hegemonic so that all members of southern society including planter elites, laboring whites, and southern blacks adopted and supported it (Genovese 1974). By the start of the Civil War white elites in the South had achieved a level of labor control over both blacks and poor whites that did not exist anywhere else in the United States or its territories. The racialization of labor in the South paralleled processes in the North.

In the industrialized North labor control also took place along racialized lines. Social reformers often referred to the laboring classes as “savages” and compared them unfavorably to Native Americans. Asylums, workhouses, almshouses, and other social institutions were created to “clear the marketplace of all but the ‘economically active’ and ‘functioning members of society. These institutions helped to discipline white indigent, delinquent, and lower working classes, and to inculcate Protestant and republican values” (Takaki 2000:127). Public charges, be they ill, indigent, criminal, or insane, were viewed in a similar negative light with little distinction between each category of person. Each group lacked republican virtue in common, and the solution for

each group was the same: they would be forcefully removed from society and/or transformed into proper persons. Poor urban residents were thus forced to forge dependent relationships with employers and to choose to either work or starve.

Fear of dependence resulted in the development of a white working class that differentiated itself from blacks. Unlike in the South, where white plantation owners equated labor with blackness, in the North, white laborers differentiated wage labor from slavery (Roediger 2007). According to David Roediger, fear of dependency on wage labor resulted in the construction of “the Black population as ‘other’ – as embodying the preindustrial, erotic, careless style of life the white worker hated and longed for” (2007:14).

Similarly, the language used by northern elites to justify both reformation and draconian measures against the poor and emergent working classes was often racial in tone. Charles Loring Brace a renowned nineteenth century philanthropist who ran the Children’s Aid Society and Newsboys’ Lodging-House in New York compared the actions of poor boys to those of “savage” Indians:

There seemed to be a very considerable class of lads in New York who bore to the busy, wealthy world about them something of the same relation which Indians bear to civilized Western settlers. They had no settled home, lived on the outskirts of society, their hand against every man’s pocket, and every man looking on them as natural enemies; their wits sharpened like those of a savage, and their principles no better. Christianity reared its temples over them, and Civilization was carrying on its great work, while they—a happy race of little heathens and barbarians—plundered or frolicked, or led their roving life, far beneath. (1872:97)

Braces’ racialized conception of poor children derived from predominant ideas about labor relations after the Civil War. Getting the “savage,” be s/he savage by nature (Indian), or by environment (poor), to respect the social order, “derived

from the long history of debate on slavery, the question of Negro ‘character,’ and the political status of ‘dependent labor’ of all kinds” (Slotkin 1985:323)

The eradication of Native Americans from the political and cultural landscape combined with the importation of Africans for the purpose of slavery mark the birth of the racial classification system upon which the US continues to be based (Feagin 1997: 16). Indeed the colonial process, from which the Native American genocide and African slave trade cannot be separated, initiated a “social structure of exploitation, appropriation, [and] domination” (Feagin 1997:16) that not only forms the basis of modern racial awareness in the U.S., but also parallels other forms of imperial domination across the globe. As Omi and Winant assert, the conquest of the Americas, Africa, and Asia, was but the first of many “racial formation projects” that situated Europe and the United States at “the center of a group of empires” (1994:62). These empires were founded on the creation and maintenance of rigid systems of racial classification that tied labor to race.

As with the racialization of blacks and Native Americans, immigrants were also racialized in similar ways.

### The Frontier as Safety Valve

Not content with removing “un-American” natives and immigrants from the streets and into institutions, many public figures sought to remove “non-functioning” members of society to the frontier. Guided by popular ideas about dispersed settlement and racialized notions of virtuous republicanism, the frontier remained an attractive safety valve for social engineers. In 1872, Brace (36) commented that the dangers of

concentrated immigrant poverty were slowly dissolving because fewer immigrants were settling in port cities and instead travelling onto the west. Indeed, he viewed expanding the traffic of poor immigrants from New York to the West as an essential solution to the problem of urban poverty:

Another alleviation to our over crowding has often been proposed, but never vigorously acted upon, as we are persuaded it might be, and that is, the making the link between the demand for labor in our country districts and the supply in New York, closer. The success of the charity, which we are about describing in the transfer of destitute and homeless children to homes in the West, and of the Commissioners of Emigration in their ‘Labor Exchange,’ indicate what might be accomplished by a grand organized movement for transferring our unemployed labor to the fields of the West. (Brace 1872:60)

Brace’s suggestion was not an original idea. Public intellectuals and politicians repeatedly evoked frontier settlement as a solution to a variety of social ills. Benjamin Franklin described dispersed settlement as a primary method of incorporating non-British immigrants such as Germans. Thomas Jefferson believed that the “vacant lands” of the frontier would provide an opportunity to maintain a predominantly agrarian way of life and thus to avoid the pitfalls of industrialization such as crowding, vice, and social disintegration (Slotkin 1985; Takaki 2000).

These ideals masked the financial incentives that guided American western expansion. Prior to 1840, western land sales remained a pivotal source of income for the federal government. Clearing the land of its native inhabitants was a key component of the national governments’ creation of a “transatlantic market in land” (Zolberg 2006:117).

Slavery and the racialization of blacks also played a direct and indirect role in U.S. western expansion. After the Civil War southern reformers sought to “civilize”

freedmen by granting them land on the frontier. Long-standing fears about a “race war” led some southern elites to call for the re-establishment of slavery or the eradication of blacks from the South altogether. Others sought to reform freedmen in ways that nevertheless removed them from the South. Slavery gave way to an equally coercive labor regime in the South that continued to depend on “disciplining a dependent work force” (Slotkin 1985:323). Reformers, however, sought to transform slave laborers into “proper persons.” The 1866 Southern Homestead Act sought to accomplish this by granting freedmen access to public lands that had been seized from Native Americans. George Washington Julian, a Congressional Representative from Indiana and chief proponent of land for freedmen “looked upon the farmer as the backbone of society and felt that by making homesteaders of former slaves he would simultaneously be making them into honest and upright citizens” (Pope 1970:201). The Southern Homestead Act, like the 1862 Homestead Act that inspired it, would transform land seized by the state from Native American populations into land owned by southern blacks and loyal whites from the North. At once, the Southern Homestead Act sought to reform blacks and make use of the lands that the state had seized from the South’s Native American populations.

#### From Frontiers to Borders

Non-European immigration, specifically immigration from Asia, the U.S. defeat of Mexico in 1848, the departure of European empires from most of North America, and the effective removal of Native Americans from much of the west resulted in the end of the frontier. The passage of the frontier further concretized an American identity that was equated with whiteness.

The conquest of the west, including the defeat of Mexico by the United States in 1848 marked a radical transformation in not just the geography of the United States, but also in U.S. immigration. The conquest of California in particular provided the United States with access to a large supply of labor from Asia, specifically China (Zolberg 2006:175) and Mexico. As with European immigration, Asian immigration was both welcomed and opposed by capitalists and laborers alike. In 1849 only a few hundred Chinese immigrants arrived in California. However, by 1852 that number had reached over 20,000 and by 1860 had reached between 35,000 and 47,000 (Zolberg 2006:175). Chinese immigrants were overwhelmingly male. Initially imported as “coolies,” a form of indentured servant, by the 1850s Chinese immigrants borrowed the cost of their ticket and contracted to Chinese merchant societies that received their pay until the debt was paid. This made Chinese immigrants highly dependent upon Chinese merchant societies. As a result, white laborers viewed Chinese immigrants as little more than slaves. Similar to the way that white laborers viewed blacks in the east, in the west white laborers objected to Chinese immigrants based on their “unfree status:”

Albeit victims of extreme exploitation, they were regarded as responsible for their own degradation: there must be something in the Oriental mind and disposition that fostered a willingness to submit to bondage, a ‘fact’ that in turn fostered the belief that the Chinese were inassimilable and must therefore be excluded. (Zolberg 2006:177)

As non-white persons, Chinese immigrants were not entitled to become naturalized citizens. Even proponents of Chinese immigration believed that the Chinese were not fit for incorporation into the national imaginary. In March of 1868, Anson Burlingame, a representative to the Chinese Empire, signed a treaty that guaranteed the right of expatriation for the Chinese, but granted no rights of citizenship to Chinese



immigrants, thus confirming that “Chinese workers would not be incorporated into American society” (Zolberg 2006:181). According to Zolberg, the official orientation toward Chinese immigrants created “an internal boundary between” citizens and racialized others who were “identified as ‘workers’ rather than as persons” (2006:181). Organized labor continued to agitate against the Chinese through the early 20th century. Moreover, small entrepreneurs and business owners who struggled to compete with Chinese business owners who employed poorly paid and poorly organized Chinese workers also urged for Exclusion.

The passage of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments further threatened to overturn the racial order in the west. The Fifteenth Amendment restricted citizenship to whites and persons of African nativity or descent. However, there was some confusion over who was racially white (or black). The passage of the Fifteenth Amendment resulted in a series of racial prerequisite cases that sought to define white racial identity in legal terms. In the prerequisite cases, the courts defined whiteness based on historical as well as pseudo-scientific criteria in ways that excluded racially undesirable groups from the benefits of citizenship, including Mexicans and Asians (Haney-López 2006).

However, the Fourteenth Amendment granted citizenship to anyone of any racial background who was born on U.S. soil. To prevent Chinese immigrants from becoming citizens, white Californians first sought to prohibit Chinese women from immigrating. Advocates for restriction publicly opposed the immigration of Chinese women by accusing them of prostitution (Zolberg 2006:188). Thus, in 1870, California passed legislation that prohibited any female Chinese passenger from entering the United States without first “presenting to the commissioner of immigration evidence that she was a

voluntary immigrant and a person of good character” (Zolberg 2006:182). In 1875, the United States passed the Alien Contract Labor Law that prohibited the importation of “coolie” labor and “women for the purposes of prostitution,” and the immigration of female prostitutes and criminals” (Zolberg 2006:188) further limited female immigration from China.

In 1882 anti-Chinese agitation resulted in the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act, which prohibited Chinese immigration for ten years. It was renewed in 1892 and again in 1902. The 1892 legislation further required that Chinese persons maintain documentation of their right to reside in the United States, “which rendered all persons of Chinese descent, regardless of status or nationality, vulnerable to police harassment and arbitrary deportation” (Zolberg 2006:191).

The Chinese Exclusion Acts had the further effect of creating the nation’s first “illegal immigrants” (Lee 2002). Prior to 1870, immigration regulations sought to exclude some classes of individuals, but were largely aimed at recruiting desirable immigrants. Additionally, opposition to immigration was based more on concern about immigrants’ perceived cultural differences, their believed un-Americanness, rather than their racial difference. With the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Acts, anti-immigrant sentiment and regulation combined cultural and racial difference as a justification for exclusion. The Chinese Exclusion Acts further instituted deportation as the remedy for illegal immigration. Finally, the Chinese Exclusion Act instituted the first border policing efforts directed at stopping a racialized group of people from entering the country without authorization (Lee 2002).

### Creating the U.S.-Mexico Border

The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, (1848) which signaled the end of the Mexican-American War required the U.S. military to police the Mexico-U.S. border. However, the purpose of border policing was designed to prevent smugglers, filibusters, and bandits from crossing into Mexico from the United States. The creation of the U.S.-Mexico border due to the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and the Gadsden Purchase<sup>3</sup> cleaved a nation in two and divided entire communities. In particular communities on either side of the Rio Grande now found themselves in different countries. The Treaty also granted U.S. citizenship to all Mexicans who were now living in the United States. As Ngai (2004) notes, this meant that Mexicans were now racialized as whites. However, as Susan Oboler (1997) notes, not all Mexicans were treated the same. Mexican landowners were afforded the benefits of citizenship, largely due to their attempts to appropriate a white racial identity, whereas poor laboring Mexicans were racialized as “other.” Even Mexican landowners, however, found it difficult to “whiten” themselves in the face of powerful anti-Mexican racism and greed.

Rather than ease hostilities and usher in a new era of peace, the end of the Mexican American War resulted in a period of intense racial conflict and violence. Widespread violence stemmed from the formation and protection of cultural boundaries, even as national boundaries were typically ignored. *Mexicanos*, now living in the Republic of Texas or other U.S. territories, increasingly became victims of both physical and economic violence at the hands of white settlers. Even those *Tejanos* (Texans of

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<sup>3</sup> The Gadsden Purchase extended the U.S. southern border in southern Arizona and southwestern New Mexico south of the Gila River and west of the Rio Grande to include modern-day Yuma and Tuscon. The purpose of the land acquisition was to provide a deep southern route for the transcontinental railroad.

Mexican descent) that fought on behalf of the United States in the Mexican American War were not immune to unprovoked attacks aimed at consolidating economic and political power into the hands of Anglo settlers (Montejano 1987). White settlers, politicians, and ranchers called Mexican residents “interlopers,” or “peons” (Griswold del Castillo 1990:68; Montejano 1987:31) and designed legislation and schemes that robbed Mexican landholders of their property and rights. Throughout the 1850s Mexicans were forcefully expelled from areas in Texas. These expulsions were considered humane alternatives to lynching, which would also have been considered an acceptable solution (Montejano 1987:28). In California, “stabblings, extortions, and lynchings” were also “commonplace American reactions to native *Californios*, whom they regarded as interlopers” (Griswold del Castillo 1990:68).

For *mexicanos* in the northern provinces, the nation held little symbolic importance (Gonzales 2009; Mora-Torres 2001). Consequently, when the border was created, *mexicanos* paid little regard to the new authority and largely ignored or openly contested the border in the aftermath of the Mexican-American War “because it was imposed on them or because it disrupted their lives” (Dunn 1996:6; Rosenbaum 1998:6). Bandits, vigilantes, and Native American tribes would often stage raids on one side of the border and retreat back across it after. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo required that the United States prevent individuals from crossing into Mexico for the purpose of conducting violent raids. However, U.S. officials typically ignored these raids prompting Mexican officials to accuse the United States of being complicit in their enactment

For Mexicans who either found or elected to become part of the United States, the border provided economic opportunities such as higher paying jobs or cheaper resources

which could then be smuggled into Mexico, avoiding the higher tariffs and prices and thus resulting in a tidy profit. Taking advantage of the difference in tariffs, Mexican entrepreneurs would smuggle goods south into Mexico for a tidy profit. During prohibition, enterprising individuals would smuggle alcohol across the border from Mexico into the United States. In short, the border created opportunities for illicit and legal exchange (Spener and Roberts 1998).

While the United States found it difficult, if not impossible to regulate the flow of goods and individuals across its southern or northern boundary, the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act as well as other federal legislation such as the Contract Labor Law, and the eradication of Native American groups and territories combined to harden the nations external borders and erect internal racial and class boundaries (Adelman and Aron 1999). It had the added effect of contributing to the centralization of state authority (Adelman and Aron 1999; Skowronek 1982). Immigration became a centrally regulated effort unlike the piecemeal efforts of the pre and post-Independence era. New immigration regulating institutions abroad created “remote controls” (Zolberg 2006) that policed immigrant populations before they even embarked for the United States. After the passage of Chinese exclusion, the United States entered into a number of agreements with private rail companies to curb illegal Chinese immigration from Canada. In Mexico, undercover immigration agents conducted searches on rail cars to enforce the new laws. (Lee 2002). The immigration enforcement measures begun at the turn of the 20th century presaged contemporary efforts that also rely on privatized security to extend the reach of the state (Lahav 2000) and that project national boundaries beyond their physical borders (Alvarez 2001).

The Johnson-Reed Act (1924) further expanded federal attempts to regulate immigration and to define the racial character of the American nation. The Johnson-Reed Act instituted immigration quotas that were based on immigration trends prior to the mass migration of the early 20th century. Proponents of the Act made a clear declaration about the preferred constitution of the American public. According to Ngai,

the national origins quota system involved a complex and subtle process in which race and nationality disaggregated and realigned in new and uneven ways. At one level, the new immigration law differentiated Europeans according to nationality and ranked them in a hierarchy of desirability. At another level, the law constructed a white American race, in which persons of European descent shared a common whiteness distinct from those deemed to be non-white. (Ngai 2004:24-25)

Importantly, though the law set precise limits for immigration from over fifty countries, it did not set quotas for Mexico or other countries in the Western Hemisphere. The Johnson-Reed Act thus created strict limits on immigration from southern and eastern Europe and made it virtually impossible for Asian immigrants to enter the country, but kept open the Mexican “back door” (Lee 2002; Ngai 2004; Zolberg 2006). Although Mexican migration was subject to periodic restriction throughout the 20th century, Mexican immigrants remained a vital source of cheap labor.

The U.S. government was complicit in enabling Mexican migration. Mexicans were not required to possess a passport to enter the United States. However Mexicans were required to pay a head tax upon entry, and if they stayed beyond their time limit they became “illegal.” According to Mae Ngai (2004) immigration policies that enabled the importation of Mexican labor also created opportunities for the formation of a group of “illegal” immigrants which in turn cast doubt on the legality of Mexican migrants. “It was ironic that Mexicans became so associated with illegal immigration because, unlike

Europeans they were not subject to numerical quotas and, unlike Asiatics, they were not excluded as racially ineligible for citizenship . . . The undocumented Mexican laborer who crossed the border to work in the burgeoning industry of commercial agriculture emerged as the prototypical illegal alien” (Ngai 2004:71).

The 1924 law also created the Border Patrol. The Border Patrol’s purpose was to control Asian and European immigration across the northern and southern borders (not Mexican migration) but spent most of its time “enforcing prohibition rather than immigration” (Zolberg 2006:266). However, the early Border Patrol interpreted its mandate as the power to apprehend “illegal” immigrants anywhere in the United States. Deportation thus became a primary weapon in immigration regulation.

Daniel Kanstroom has described deportation as a powerful method of arbitrary social control. Its legal roots, he argues, stem from the Chinese exclusion, but its ideological roots extend beyond to the “brutal removal of the Cherokee and other American Indians from their lands and to the laws governing thousands of fugitive slaves, captured and forcibly sent back to their masters from the late eighteenth through the mid-nineteenth century” (2007:7). In short, deportation represents a majoritarian effort to control racialized groups.

The most spectacular expression of the state’s power to deport occurred in 1950 with Operation Wetback. From 1942 to 1964, the Bracero Program provided the United States with a steady stream of agricultural labor. Though the Bracero program allowed for large numbers of “legal” migrants, “illegal” Mexican migration also increased. From 1942 to 1953 the apprehension of undocumented Mexican immigration increased more than 400 percent from 182,000 to 850,000 (Dunn 1996:14). Operation Wetback was a

massive government effort aimed at “apprehending and deporting undocumented agricultural workers from the Southwest” (Ngai 2004:155). Operation Wetback was designed and implemented as a military operation which targeted undocumented immigrants as “an ‘enemy’ to be repulsed and driven out” (Dunn 1996:16). The campaign targeted border communities but also extended deep into the interior with searches taking place in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Chicago (Ngai 2004:156). Operation Wetback resulted in the apprehension and deportation of over 801,069 individuals (Ngai 2004:156) many of whom were U.S. citizens (Carrasco 1997).

The 1952 McCarran-Walter Act modified the 1924 law. Also known as the Immigration and Naturalization Law of 1952, it liberalized the quota system and eased family reunification, but largely maintained bars to non-white immigration (Zolberg 2006:317). It was not until the 1960s when Congress passed the Immigration Act of 1965 that national origins quotas were done away with altogether. The 1965 law established the annual ceiling on immigration to 250,000 and set hemispheric quotas that privileged family reunification. Though the 1965 law liberalized immigration from eastern and southern Europe as well as Asia, it severely curtailed legal Mexican migration. The 1965 law set the Mexican quota at 20,000 entrants per year, a dramatic drop off from the 235,000 individuals that entered as braceros or other legal entrants in the years preceding the law’s implementation (Ngai 2004:261). Historical migration patterns, including those initiated and routinized by state policies resulted in increased undocumented Mexican migration as a result. As undocumented immigration increased so also did apprehensions so that by 1976 the Immigration and Naturalization Service apprehended and deported 781,000 Mexicans from the United States (Ngai 2004:261). Not only did the 1965 law



result in large numbers of undocumented immigrants, it also resulted in the highest rates of legal immigration since the peak years of the early 20th century (Bean, Edmonston, and Passel 1990:1).

### Contemporary Trends in Border Control

Since the passage of the 1965 immigration law, political and economic integration between the United States and Mexico have increased dramatically. The border region, in particular urban border zones such as the San Diego/Tijuana, El Paso/Ciudad Juarez, and McAllen/Reynosa regions, have experienced rapid economic and demographic growth as a result of increased cross border flows (Nevins 2002:4-5). Between 1986 and 2003 cross border flows between Mexico and the United States increased dramatically with the largest growth occurring after the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1994. By 2003 trade between the two countries totaled over \$235 billion. As the flow of goods and capital increased, so also did the flow of people into the United States increase. Total border crossings increased from 114 million in 1986 to over 290 million in 2000 (Massey 2005:4-5).

At the same time, both documented and undocumented migration steadily continued to rise. “Legal” immigration, which averaged 330,000 persons per year during the 1960s climbed to over 1 million per year through the 1990s (Massey 1999:316). Total immigration peaked in 1999-2000 at 1.54 million total entries (Passel 2005). As a result of the decline in the United States economy, beginning in 2001, immigration to the United States steadily declined but remains over 1 million entrants per year.

As migratory flows have increased, the past three decades have also seen a dramatic growth in the foreign born population. In 1970 the U.S. foreign-born population numbered 9.6 million, or less than five percent of the population. By 1990 that number jumped to 19.8 million persons or around eight percent of the total population. In 2008 the total number of foreign-born persons residing in the United States reached ten percent of the total population totaling 31.1 million individuals (Passel and Cohn 2008).

Undocumented immigrants make up a substantial proportion of the annual inflow of immigrants into the United States as well as the total foreign-born population. For example, undocumented Mexican migration grew from only 87,000 entries in 1965 to 2.9 million in 1989 (Massey and Singer 1995). Massey and Singer estimate that a total of 36.5 million unauthorized entries from Mexico took place between 1965 and 1990. The total annual increase in the United States' undocumented immigrant population was much less, however. Due to the cyclical nature of Mexican migration patterns prior to the 1990s, 86% of unauthorized entries were offset by return migration (Massey and Singer 1995: 210).

Changes in migration patterns, specifically the change from cyclical migratory patterns to more permanent settlement, resulted in a steady growth in the undocumented immigrant population in the United States throughout the 1990s and 2000s. Throughout the 1990s, the annual net growth in the undocumented population averaged roughly 500,000 per year (Passel 2005) and peaked in 2000 at 662,000 (Passel 2005) before returning to a 500,000 per year average that has declined annually since 2005 (Passel and Cohn 2008). According to a Pew Hispanic Center report (Passel and Cohn 2008), the total undocumented immigrant population totaled 8.4 million in 2000, 11.1 million in

2005 and 11.9 million in 2005, with unauthorized Mexican immigrants totaling 7 million. This shows a rapid increase in the undocumented population in the first half of 2000s followed by relative stability in the latter half of the '00s.<sup>4</sup>

### Effect of Border Security on Migration

What is remarkable about the dramatic growth in cross-border flows, including undocumented migration is that it has taken place even as the United States ramps up its surveillance and violence wielding capabilities at the border. Since the late 1970s, border policing efforts have expanded at a rapid pace. In 1978 the Immigration and Naturalization budget totaled \$283.1 million.<sup>5</sup> In 1988, that figure jumped 185% to just over \$800 million (Dunn 1996:35). By 2002 the budget of the INS ballooned from \$474 million to over \$6 billion while the Border Patrol's budget went from just \$151 million in 1986 to \$1.6 billion in 2002 (Massey 2005:5). Additionally, between 1980 and 2008, the number of Border Patrol agents rose from roughly 2,000 employees to over 18,000 (Dinan 2008; Massey 2006).

In recent years, expenditures on border security have eclipsed other Department of Homeland Security (DHS) efforts. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), the federal agency that oversees the Border Patrol, received 20% of the overall DHS budget for 2010, more than any other DHS agency. When combined with Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the U.S. government spent roughly \$16.5 billion on immigration and border regulation with more than \$11 billion of that going to CBP, and over \$3 billion

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<sup>4</sup> The steady decline undocumented migration since 2005 and the continued eastward shift in clandestine cross border traffic has resulted in lower numbers of undocumented migration through eastern San Diego County. I discuss the effects of these changes in the following chapter.

<sup>5</sup> All totals in nominal dollars unless otherwise indicated.

spent on border security efforts between ports of entry—more than any other CBP initiative (U.S. Dept. of Homeland Security 2010). Additionally, beginning with the Clinton Administration and continuing under George W. Bush and Barack Obama, the U.S. government has periodically sent National Guard Troops to aid the Border Patrol in its border security efforts.

Expenditures on border security go beyond simply putting “boots on the ground,” but include building fences and developing high tech surveillance technologies. For example, in 2005, the Department of Homeland Security awarded Boeing a three-year, \$2.7 billion dollar contract to build a “virtual” fence (Witte 2006). The Secure Border Initiative, as it was called, was never implemented and was abandoned in early 2011. Additionally, The Secure Fence Act, passed in 2006, mandated the building of 700 miles of physical fence at a cost of up to \$70 million per mile (Johnson 2007). As of 2010, the U.S. government had erected a little over 600 miles of new fencing. The result has been an unprecedented escalation of border security expenditures and militarization of the border since the 1970s, resulting in the emergence of border security as the primary language of U.S. immigration policy (Ceyhan and Tsoukala 2002; Dunn 1996; see also Purcell and Nevins 2005).

Guiding this escalation in personnel and surveillance technologies on the border is the Border Patrol’s strategy of “prevention through deterrence.” Begun in 1993 with Operation Hold the Line in El Paso, Texas, and Operation Gatekeeper in San Diego, California, the prevention through deterrence strategy concentrates immigration efforts at the most popular crossing points in ways that force migrants to cross more dangerous and remote locations (Andreas 2001:596). By forcing immigrants to cross through more

hostile terrain, the Border Patrol seeks to increase “the cost, the physical risk, and the probability of apprehension on each entry attempt” to such a degree that immigrants will elect not to cross at all (Cornelius 2001:667). By increasing apprehension rates and “the visibility of the Border Patrol” the state hopes to discourage potential migrants from making the attempt to cross (Cornelius and Salehyan 2007:142).

However, the impact of the current enforcement regime has had little impact as a deterrent (Cornelius 2001; Cornelius and Salehyan 2007; Donato, Durand, and Massey 1992; Kimball, Acosta, and Dames 2007; Massey and Singer 1995), has failed to prevent undocumented immigration, and has actually decreased the likelihood of apprehension (Gathmann 2008). Instead the current immigration enforcement strategy has increased the likelihood that migrants will die on their way north, resulted in costlier and longer travel, and has had the unintended consequences of increasing the size and makeup of the undocumented population (Cerutti and Massey 2004; Singer and Massey 1997).

According to multiple studies, the deterrent effect of enhanced border security appears to be minimal. Border Patrol apprehensions rose from just under one million in 1994 to 16.4 million in 2000 with the highest apprehension rates taking place at the most heavily policed crossing points (Cornelius 2001:664-665). However, migrants have merely shifted to areas that are less heavily policed. Undocumented migrants are now more likely to cross through legal ports of entry (Cornelius and Salehyan 2007:150) or through more remote and dangerous terrain. Whereas Texas and California typically experienced the highest flows of cross border traffic in the 1980s and early 1990s, the Arizona-Mexico border region now experiences the highest rates of undocumented migration. This shift in clandestine cross-border traffic has also shifted eastward in

California (Cornelius 2001:667). As a result of the shift in migratory traffic and despite the rapid increase in undocumented cross border flows, the rate of apprehension has actually decreased (Gathmann 2008:1937).

Research on migrant sending communities shows that roughly 70% of undocumented migrants avoid detection on their first attempts to cross into the United States. According to a study conducted by Wayne Cornelius and Idean Salehyan (2007) that included a survey of 184 individuals who had, in the past, crossed into the United States without authorization, 75% crossed without being detected on their first attempt. In a study conducted by Douglas Massey and Audrey Singer (Massey and Singer 1995:26), roughly 70% of their respondents reported entering the United States on their first attempt. 98% of their respondents reported entering the United States in five or fewer tries. 100% of their respondents reported entering eventually, including one survey respondent who was apprehended *twenty* times before successfully making his way into the United States.<sup>6</sup> In another study, Donato, Durand, and Massey found that “the number of attempts was always one greater than the number of apprehensions; that is, all migrants simply tried until they succeeded” (Donato, Durand, and Massey 1992:872). These data are further supported by Kimball, Acosta, and Dames (2007:92) who found that over 70% of their sample succeeded in crossing on their first attempt and 97% eventually entered the United States without authorization . According to Cornelius and Salehyan (2007:149), not only do migrants continue to attempt to cross until they are

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<sup>6</sup> Massey and Singer’s (1995) interviews were primarily conducted with individuals in Mexico who had attempted to migrate to the United States in the past and supplemented with interviews of out-migrant households in the United States. They catalogued the entire migratory history of each household that they surveyed including number of times that they attempted to cross and how often they were apprehended. Their results show conclusively that in each case, respondents continued to try to cross into the United States until they were ultimately successful.

successful, but they do so despite an awareness that it is now more difficult and costlier to cross. In other words, the deterrent effect of the current border enforcement strategy has a minimal effect on both migrants' decisions to enter the United States and their abilities to enter without detection.

By purposely shifting migratory traffic through more remote and environmentally hostile terrain, the United States has merely increased the cost and physical risks associated with crossing clandestinely. Higher and uneven levels of border surveillance mean that migrants are often forced to rely on advanced smuggling networks to gain successful entry into the U.S., especially for first time crossers (Singer and Massey 1997). According to Cerutti and Massey, between 80 and 90 percent of first-time border crossers utilize the services of a *coyote* or guide (2004:29; see also Gathmann 2008). The price for *coyotes*, or smugglers, has also increased dramatically in recent years (Gathmann 2008:1938). In the San Diego/Tijuana area, smugglers' fees averaged \$490 in 1995. By mid-2001 *coyotes* charged between \$1200 and \$1500 per person (Cornelius 2001:668). While most migrants save money or borrow it from relatives, the high guide fees mean that many immigrants choose instead to serve as drug "mules" as a way to offset the costs of travelling (Heyman 1999:436; Slack and Whitford 2011:17). Furthermore, migrants may also have to participate in other "conspiracies to avoid the law" (Heyman 1998) such as obtaining false documents in order to avoid detection once they have settled in the United States. Having to rely on smuggling networks and fraudulent documents means that immigrants are at greater risk for incarceration, deportation, physical harm, and labor exploitation (Heyman 1998; Podgorny 2009; Slack and Whitford 2011:17).

By forcing migrants to attempt to cross through hostile and dangerous terrain, the state also increases the physical cost of undocumented migration. According to Wayne Cornelius (2001:669), between 1994 (the year that Operation Gatekeeper and the prevention through deterrence strategy was initiated) and 2000, migrant deaths along the southwest border increased 474%. Deaths due to traffic accidents and homicide stayed relatively constant while deaths due to exposure (hypothermia, dehydration, and sunstroke) rose from less than 10 deaths in 1994 to over 80 in 2000 (670; see also Reyes, Johnson, and Van Swearingen 2002). It is important to reemphasize that the physical costs associated with crossing are *intended* consequences of the current border security strategy. What are the unintended consequences?

Due to the higher costs associated with crossing, undocumented migrants are more likely to settle permanently rather than travel back and forth between the U.S. and Mexico (Cornelius 2001; Massey, Durand, and Malone 2002; Riosmena 2004). Perhaps as a consequence of more permanent settlement patterns, women and children are also migrating more frequently (Suro 2005:11). In 2005, women made up approximately 29 percent of the total undocumented population residing in the United States. Women also made up 40 percent of the undocumented population aged 18-39. 1.7 million of the more than 10 million undocumented migrants, or 1 in 6, was a child (Passel 2005:3)

Finally, undocumented immigrants are increasingly settling in non-traditional states (Durand, Massey, and Charvet 2000). Though California, Texas, Illinois, and New York continue to dominate as destination states (Durand, Massey, and Capoferro 2005; Kimball, Acosta, and Dames 2007), undocumented immigrants are increasingly settling in the South, in areas such as Georgia and North Carolina, in the Midwest, and in the



mountain states such as Colorado. Arizona, specifically Phoenix, has also experienced high growth in its undocumented population due mainly to the fact that it is the primary location where undocumented migrants now attempt to cross the border (Donato, Tolbert II, Nucci, and Kawano 2007; Durand, Massey, and Capoferro 2005; Durand, Massey, and Charvet 2000). These new settlement patterns are a result of the opening of economic opportunities in new regions, as well as labor market saturation, economic decline, and anti-immigrant sentiment in gateway states, especially California (Durand, Massey, and Capoferro 2005; Durand, Massey, and Charvet 2000).

In sum, the result of the current border enforcement effort is that the size of the undocumented population is larger and more geographically dispersed than ever before. Larger and more concentrated migrant populations are thus more visible to a broader segment of the American public, particularly in areas not typically associated with immigration from Mexico and Latin America. Even though the undocumented population has not grown since 2005, and undocumented migration has decreased annually over the same time frame, changing settlement patterns have made undocumented immigration more *visible* to a broader segment of the U.S. public (Durand, Massey, and Capoferro 2005:150-151). In addition to increases in documented and undocumented immigration, the character of migratory flows changed. European immigrants, who constituted roughly 70 percent of incoming migrants during the 1950s, constituted just fifteen percent of new immigrants in the 1980s. In contrast, immigration from Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean increased from 30 percent to over 80 percent of new immigrants during the 1980s (Bean, Edmonston, and Passel 1990:1).

### The Contemporary Legislative Response

In response to the changing dynamics of U.S. immigration and as a result of renewed anti-immigrant opposition, federal, state, and municipal governments have passed a variety of immigration regulations that have sought to limit the number of documented and undocumented migrants from Mexico and Latin America, prohibit immigrants from accessing welfare and other public services, and limit undocumented immigrants access to housing and work.

In 1986 Congress passed the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA). IRCA sought to stem undocumented immigration by legalizing the status of millions of undocumented immigrants and making it illegal to hire undocumented laborers. The passage of IRCA did not significantly decrease undocumented immigration, however (Bean, Edmonston, and Passel 1990). Moreover, the federal government has rarely prosecuted employers for hiring undocumented laborers.

Popular opposition to undocumented immigration further resulted in the passage of California's Proposition 187. Prop 187, also known as the Save Our State Initiative, made undocumented immigrants ineligible for public services such as non-emergency medical care and public schooling. Prop 187 would also expand immigrant policing by requiring health care providers, local law enforcement personnel, and educators to report undocumented immigrants. Though the law was passed in 1994, it was later ruled unconstitutional. Nevertheless, Proposition 187 represented renewed calls to restrict undocumented migration in general, and Mexican migration in particular.

Though Prop 187 had limited practical effect, it had a powerful symbolic impact (Jacobson 2008). According to Kitty Calavita (1996), proponents of the measure

emphasized the perceived negative economic impact that undocumented immigrants had on the California economy. The passage of Proposition 187 “reconfirmed to a predisposed electorate that illegal immigrants over-burden government services and contribute to the fiscal crisis. Thus, as the welfare state is dismantled, the cutbacks are blamed on illegal immigrants who have stretched the system beyond capacity” (Calavita 1996:298).

The passage of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) of 1996 further emphasized the perceived negative fiscal effects of undocumented immigration. Like IRCA, IIRIRA set penalties for hiring undocumented immigrants. It also excluded undocumented immigrants from accessing public benefit programs and made sponsorship legally binding.<sup>7</sup> Most of IIRIRA’s provisions focused on enforcement and border policing specifically. IIRIRA provided for the hiring of 5,000 Border Patrol agents and the building of border fencing. It also lowered the standards for deportable criminal offenses to include any violent act, including misdemeanors, with an imposed sentence of at least a year. In short, IIRIRA and IRCA combined to concretize border security and deportation as the primary logic of U.S. immigration regulation. The dramatic increase in border security efforts (Ackleson 2004; Coleman 2005) is a direct consequence of over a century of immigration regulation that increasingly sought to police and exclude racialized populations.

The 9/11 attacks resulted in the emergence of a new anti-immigrant discourse that drew on the border security discourse and attached it to a developing homeland security

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<sup>7</sup> Welfare Reform, passed in the same year, also prevented most documented immigrants from accessing public benefits.

effort. The federal government continued to expand border policing efforts even as undocumented immigration continued apace (Andreas 2003; Cornelius and Salehyan 2007; Massey 2005; Passel and Cohn 2008). Additionally, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the successor to the INS responsible for interior immigration enforcement, conducted a series of spectacular worksite raids throughout the early 21st century (Powell 2008; Saulny 2008). The result has been an official immigration regulation regime that relies on highly visible (and spectacular) policing efforts that primarily target undocumented migrants from Asia and Latin America.

The renewed emphasis on national security has also resulted in more state and municipal laws that target undocumented immigrants specifically. In 2006 the Colorado state government passed a law that required businesses to provide proof that their workers are legally eligible for employment and also required that all adult recipients of state aid, including unemployment benefits, retirement benefits, and public housing, to verify their immigration status (Kelley 2006). As a result, migrant laborers did not return to Colorado the following year resulting in a large labor shortage. To solve its agricultural labor programs, Colorado provided farm owners with prison labor (Battey 2007). The Colorado legislature's Joint Budget Committee also reported that the immigration laws likely cost the government millions more than it saved (Couch 2007).

That same year the city of Hazleton, Pennsylvania passed the Illegal Immigration Relief Act, which sought to deny permits to businesses that hired undocumented workers and made it illegal to rent housing to undocumented immigrants. The law was never implemented and is currently under appeal in the federal courts. As with California's Prop 187, the fact that Hazleton's anti-immigrant law was not implemented did not limit

its symbolic impact. As a result of the laws passage, immigrants left the city resulting in a farm labor shortage, a drop in demand for some services, and more housing vacancies (Barry 2006).

Recent legislation passed by Arizona and Alabama further reveals a tolerance for increasingly punitive efforts targeted at undocumented immigrants. In 2010 Arizona enacted Senate Bill 1070 which made it a crime for immigrants to fail to carry immigration documents and granted local police with the power to arrest anyone suspected of being in the country without documentation (Archibold 2010). In 2011 the Alabama state government enacted similar legislation that made it a crime to not carry immigration documents and also made it a crime to shelter, employ, and even transport an undocumented immigrant. The law further required public schools to check the immigration status of their students and banned undocumented students from attending college or university.

In sum, the Minutemen emerge during a time of intense border enforcement and restrictive regulations that target undocumented immigrants. The result has been an intensification of anti-immigration activity and sentiment throughout the United States.

### Who are the Minutemen?

The contemporary minuteman movement became a national phenomenon when Jim Gilchrist, a retired accountant and Vietnam War veteran from California, joined forces with Chris Simcox, an ex-school teacher and newspaper publisher who was living in Arizona to form the Minuteman Project. In April 2005, Gilchrist's Minuteman Project and Simcox's Civil Homeland Defense organized the first Minuteman Project protest at

the border in southeastern Arizona. For the entire month volunteer border watchers took part in what they described as a national protest at the border. Over the course of the month close to 900 volunteers at one time or another waved signs, sat in lawn chairs, and staked out a 23-mile stretch of territory near the U.S.-Mexico border.

Supporters, protesters, and media personnel alike flocked to the Arizona desert to bear witness to the spectacle. Prior to the event Minuteman Project representatives and media outlets declared that over 1,000 volunteers were ready to mass at the border. In the first week fewer than 100 volunteers actually showed up however (ACLU 2006:5). Law enforcement personnel, media representatives and protesters/legal observers actually outnumbered Minuteman volunteers (ACLU 2006; Chavez 2008; Seper 2005b).

Given their limited numbers and their lack of training, it is perhaps not surprising that the Minutemen had a limited practical impact on undocumented migration during the April 2005 event. Minuteman organizers claimed that they contributed to lower than normal illegal traffic throughout the 20-mile long operation area. A *Washington Times* (2005) report stated that field agents confirmed that the Minutemen helped slow traffic from 500 migrants a day to less than fifteen. Border Patrol Supervisors, on the other hand, complained that Minuteman volunteers “unnecessarily [tripped] sensors, [disturbed] draglines and [interfered] with the normal operations of the agents,” that their impact on migrant traffic was “negligible,” and that they should leave law enforcement to “the professionals” (Seper 2005a). Federal Officials also noted that the decline in apprehensions had more to do with the U.S. Arizona Border Control Initiative that deployed dozens of new agents in the area (Ketcham 2005). News sources also reported that Mexican government officials were encouraging would-be migrants to cross at other

locations along the border (Jerry Seper 2005c). In short, the inaugural Minuteman event most likely had a very limited material affect on migratory traffic in April 2005.

The aim of the event, however, was not just about stopping “illegals,” rather the true purpose was to cause a media stir that would pressure Congress and the President to expend more resources on border security. In a *Washington Times* article, Gilchrist stated

We hope to bring enough attention also that we can send a message to our leaders in Washington, D.C., that this is our country, too. This border issue is about all 50 states, not just Arizona or Texas. It’s about our Constitution and how it applies to all of us. We’re looking for this nation to again be guided by the rule of law, not a nation ruled by an endless mob of illegal aliens streaming across our borders like a tsunami, a culture shock that someday - perhaps soon - we will have neither the manpower nor the will to stop. (Seper 2005c)

Less than two weeks into the event, Congressional Representative and member of the Congressional Immigration Reform Caucus, Tom Tancredo (R-CO) praised the project and declared it a success (Jerry Seper 2005a). He congratulated the Minutemen and stated “By all reports you have accomplished your primary mission, which was to draw public attention to the deplorable and unacceptable conditions on our borders” (Jerry Seper 2005a). After the event, Congressperson J.D. Hayworth (R-AZ), also a member of the Congressional Immigration Reform Caucus, further praised the April Minuteman protest events. “What the Minutemen proved to the American people was this: The federal government can do something about illegal immigration other than to raise a white flag and surrender to the invasion on our Southern border,” he said. “They not only discouraged the illegal crossing of our border, if only temporarily, but they also cast light on a national disgrace. I hope more members of Congress and more officials in this

administration will see the light and join us to strongly enforce our laws against illegal immigration” (Jerry Seper 2005a).

The Minutemen echoed their Congressional supporters when they declared success three weeks into the protest event. Touting the practical impact that the Minutemen had on migratory traffic, Gilchrist crowed, “We did in our first 10 days what the federal government and Congress couldn’t do over the past 10 years,” (Seper 2005a:A1). A year later, the Heritage Foundation, a leading conservative think tank, praised the Minuteman Project and suggested that the U.S. government privatize some aspects of border security by contracting out some of the administrative, logistical, and surveillance functions of border security to private firms and civilian volunteers (Carafano et al 2006).

Despite the praise that the Minutemen received from a handful of public officials, the immediate federal response was an overwhelmingly negative one. Prior to the event, law enforcement officials expressed concerns about armed civilians patrolling the border. The head of the Border Patrol’s Tucson, AZ sector advised potential Minutemen volunteers to stay away from the border. Citing the potential for violence he stated “People certainly have the right to demonstrate to make a political point, and we will not interfere with that, but they are absolutely not equipped to deal with the border environment...It could be a very volatile situation, one that reasonable people ought to avoid” (Seper 2005c). Local law enforcement agents also expressed concerns over the potentials for violence that the Minutemen protest might evoke.

As President Bush met with Mexican President Vicente Fox he compared the Minutemen unfavorably to vigilantes. “I’m against vigilantes in the United States of



America,” he said. “I’m for enforcing law in a rational way. It’s why we’ve got the Border Patrol, and they ought to be in charge of enforcing the border” (Chavez 2008:36).

Nevertheless, the first Minuteman event was a huge media success and had a variety of impacts. The Minuteman Project muster inspired a slew of legislation that Congress introduced in both the House and Senate. For example, the Border Protection Corps Act (H.R. 3622) would have allowed states to establish militias that would aid in the prevention of unauthorized migration. The Protect America Together Act (H.R. 3704) would have created a national Border Patrol Auxiliary that would report unauthorized border crossings to the Border Patrol (Nuñez-Neto 2005). California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger praised the Minutemen, claiming that they were doing a “terrific job” in the absence of the federal government doing “their job” (Nicholas and Salladay 2005).

The Minuteman Corps of California grew directly from the April event. After the event Chris Simcox and Jim Gilchrist parted ways with Gilchrist retaining the Minuteman Project moniker. Simcox created the Minuteman Civil Defense Corps and set about organizing chapters throughout the country. A group of California residents, inspired by Simcox’s efforts, formed a chapter and initiated their first muster in April 2006. In 2007, the California chapter incorporated as the Minuteman Corps of California, Inc. so that they could enter into a lease to create Camp Vigilance.

Nearly all muster participants are white males over the age of forty, with a large number of retirees. Women make up less than 10 percent of muster participants. MCC members number in the thousands, but only a hundred or so members participate in musters with less than half that number regularly attending musters. In the early years weekend musters would attract up to fifty members. Lately those numbers have dwindled

down to less than thirty and sometimes down into the teens. During month-long musters weekends remain the most popular dates with mid-week participants typically numbering less than ten. Volunteers who live in southern California typically dominate weekend musters. Volunteers from Northern California and out of state rarely participate in weekend musters due to the time and cost of travel. Instead, they participate in the April and October muster often spending a week to two weeks at Camp Vigilance.

The MCC for the most part adheres to a strict Standard Operating Procedure or “SOP”. They restrict their activity to observing and reporting undocumented migration to the Border Patrol. They do not wear full camouflage. And although most are armed they do not carry long arms like rifles or shotguns on their person, but are allowed to keep them in their vehicles.

There are a number of other non-affiliated minuteman groups that operate in the area that are less organized and that maintain less rigid rules and regulations. Many of the local organizations are comprised of former members of the MCC, MCDC, or Minuteman Project.

### Anatomy of an Operation

#### The Meeting

After breakfast each morning and after dinner each evening Minuteman leaders hold a meeting in which they inform the larger group about the previous day/nights operations, what, if anything, Border Patrol agents have told them in the field, and the objectives for the day. Meetings can last as long as an hour. During these meetings leaders lay out where operations will take place and in how many shifts. The delegation

of duties often begins slowly. As leaders ask for volunteers for shifts, few individuals typically volunteer at first. Individuals that have worked together tend to coordinate privately so that they will work together again.

The number of vehicles going to each site and their passenger capacity typically limits space for each operation. Volunteers thus often negotiate with each other over who will travel with whom and for which shifts. When the Minutemen attracted large numbers of volunteers, they conducted multiple operations throughout the night. Operations were typically conducted in three shifts at dusk, midnight, and closer to dawn.<sup>8</sup> Individual volunteers thus based their choice of operation on location, time, and with whom they would be partnered. As a result, the planning meetings were often mildly chaotic and could run longer than an hour.

### Gearing Up and Heading Out

After the meeting individuals retreated to their tents, vehicles, campers, RVs, and bunks, or they helped with cleanup or congregated at the Grotto outside. Those who were preparing for the next shift would gear up and get ready for their upcoming shift. For daytime operations Minutemen will often bring a folding chair, binoculars, camera, water, sun block and a sidearm. Some members do not carry weapons. This was not uncommon in the early years, but by my final muster I was often the only person on the operation that did not carry a gun. On each operation at least one member must be armed.

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<sup>8</sup> I do not describe specific operation times for two reasons. Throughout my time with the Minutemen and especially as the activity level of their membership declined, their tactics changed. Although operations in the early years tended to take place in four-hour blocks throughout the night, they often made adjustments based on the observed patterns of migratory traffic. Although most of their operations still take place over four hour periods, the start and end time, as well as number of operations during a particular day/night still change for a variety of reasons including, number of operations and volunteers, travel distance, and personal stamina. I also omit specific start times to protect Minuteman safety.

Few members will carry a shotgun or rifle in their vehicle. One or two other members carried other “toys” on daytime operations such as GPS devices. Each member also carried with them a hand-held radio, or walkie-talkie.

For nighttime operations, members would typically carry much of the same equipment such as chairs, radio, and weapons, but they would also bring flashlights, spotlights with infrared lenses, and night vision equipment that they either bought or that they borrowed from the MCC. The MCC owned a number of radios, equipped with their own FCC licensed frequency, night vision scopes, high powered spotlights, and a thermal imaging camera that detected body heat thus allowing you to see at night.

The person operating the Comm. Center issues radios and night vision scopes (for night ops) and gives call signs to each person carrying a radio. When the convoy left the property the Comms operator calls the Border Patrol to inform them of the number of volunteers, the number of vehicles including make, model, color, and license plate number, and destination so that the Border Patrol knows when and where the Minutemen are operating.

During the pre-operation routine the Comm. Center and the area between it and the bunkhouse is abuzz with activity. Individuals gearing up or staging as they wait to embark enter and exit the Comm. Center. Operations rarely begin on time.

Once everyone gathers their gear and is finished with their preparations, they enter their vehicles and head out for the operation site. Typically as they exit the property individuals will conduct a radio check. It is not uncommon for individuals, even operation leaders, to forget their call sign. It is also not uncommon for individuals to forget to turn on their radios. Sometimes, individuals will have the volume too low and so

will not hear communication on the radio. A minor delay between when the operator depresses the button to talk and when the radio starts the broadcast often means that messages sent by novice radio operators are cut off at the beginning. The chaotic start to each operation was at times a source of consternation and frustration for the Minutemen volunteers with which I travelled, but was more often a source of hilarity and gentle ribbing after the operation.

### The Operation

Many operations took place on the camp property. For those that took place at the actual physical border, they took place on either private or Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land. In 2006 and 2007, the MCC contacted local residents and received permission from a number of individuals to conduct operations on their property. Most operations, however, took place on BLM land, which is public and permits the carrying of firearms.

Operation characteristics changed depending on location, purpose, and personnel. Some operations were “overt.” Participants in overt operations did not take precautions to remain hidden or silent. One such operation consisted of Minuteman members shining lights across the border and driving up and down the border. According to volunteers that I spoke with, these types of operations were common in the first year of the MCC and were conducted at the Border Patrol’s shift changes.

Most of the night ops<sup>9</sup> were conducted covertly. During covert operations, MCC volunteers would adopt a number of tactics to mask their movements, numbers, and

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<sup>9</sup> Volunteers almost always referred to operations as “ops.”

location.<sup>10</sup> Once set up, volunteers set up behind bushes and rocks. As the MCC often conducted operations from an elevated position, conscientious members also hid in front of large rock formations or bushes to prevent their silhouette from appearing against the sky.

Though most night ops were designed for covert activity, they often failed to remain truly covert. Border Patrol trucks often gave away Minuteman positions as their lights illuminated Minuteman positions. Similarly, other local Minuteman groups would often “light up” the position of hidden volunteers. Many members often conducted their operations from the comfort of their vehicles. Though some members took care to hide their vehicles, many did not. Most members did not practice very much noise discipline, which could also reveal their position, whether they were hidden or not. Many members enjoyed chatting, sometimes loudly, and on one occasion our position was given away due to a members’ untimely bout of flatulence.

When MCC members observed anyone on the Mexican side of the border, anyone that they suspected of crossing the border, or any other “suspicious” activity, they radioed the Comm. Center operator at Camp Vigilance. They gave detailed information that the Comm. Center operator in turn relayed to the Border Patrol. To do this, the Comm. Center operator called the Border Patrol station that was closest to the operation site. The Border Patrol was very responsive. Though I did not witness many clandestine border crossers, or participate in many operations that resulted in the MCC contacting Border Patrol, in each case the Border Patrol responded within an hour, and often within minutes.

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<sup>10</sup> At the MCC’s request I avoid specific tactical details in favor of more general descriptions.

How do we make sense of the ease with which the Minutemen were able to get the Border Patrol to respond to their requests for aid, especially when we consider the ambivalence with which they were viewed by the state when they first began their border patrols? To begin to answer this question it is first important to understand how and why the Minutemen took part in armed border patrols. What were the motivations, goals, and reasons that individual activists gave for joining? What inspired their decision to join the Minutemen, and once they became members, what did they hope to accomplish?

## CHAPTER 3

### LOSING CONTROL

“I guess I just got involved because of something to do, something to spend my time on. And I’ve always been very concerned about the direction my country is going in and the illegal immigration problem has troubled me. And I thought, here’s my chance to serve my country again,” explained Joshua Gallant<sup>11</sup> a white man of German descent. If the Minutemen are an organization comprised of older members—most of its members are in their fifties or older, with many near or past retirement age—Joshua, who is well into his eighties, is undoubtedly its elder statesmen. If age has dampened his ability to climb rocks and crawl in the weeds in search of the Minutemen’s “illegal” quarry, it has not dampened his enthusiasm for the cause or the group. Joshua attends each muster at Camp Vigilance, including month long musters, where he typically spends at minimum three to four days per week in camp. This makes him one of the most active and committed members. Physically unable to participate in most border watch activities, Joshua instead spends most of his time helping out around camp. Throughout the day and night as other Minutemen sleep, eat, talk, and “go out on ops,” Joshua can be seen shuffling through camp with broom, chainsaw, or some other tool in hand as he carries out his “chores” without complaint. When Joshua is present, the fire in the bunkhouse is

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<sup>11</sup> The names and minor identifying characteristics have been altered to protect the identities of my participants. Some minor ethnographic details such as operations locations, descriptions, and activities have also been altered to protect participant confidentiality.



always lit, the meeting room is always clean, and the coffee is always ready. His tireless efforts have garnered him a tremendous amount of respect from his fellow Minutemen.

After the evening meeting and after a team of Minutemen had gone out to a border operation site, Joshua sat down with me to discuss his experiences with the Minutemen and his reasons for joining. We sat together at a table in an RV that I rented for the purpose of conducting interviews. Slight of build, Joshua slid easily onto the bench seat across the table from me. He sat sideways with his back against the window that ran along the trailer's wall. He wore a white t-shirt and jeans. Atop his head he wore a black hat with the emblem of his army regiment. His smoky glasses appropriately framed the face of a man who is rarely seen without cigar in mouth. The sweet scented tobacco smoke filled the trailer as he spoke.

After his wife passed away, Joshua sought out the Minutemen as an opportunity to occupy his time and once again serve his country. Prior to joining the Minutemen, Joshua supported other conservative and immigration control groups but never as an active member. He did not participate in protests or in other forms of political action but would send in money to help support a few conservative causes. The Minutemen provided Joshua an opportunity to bring his political and patriotic ideals together.

"I love my country. I'm extremely...I'm ultra-patriotic. I fly two flags around my home—one in the back yard on a pole with lights and one in the front yard on a pole with lights. And, uh, like I said, I love my country. . . . I'm an ultra-ultra-American. Ultra-ultra-conservative," Joshua later explained.

"Are those two the same thing," I asked.

“Well, there’s room for moderation, but not much,” he replied, laughing. “There is no room for leftists. No room for socialism, progressivism, whatever they want to call it. It’s contrary, as far as I’m concerned, to the Constitution, although I am not a constitutional scholar.”

The way Joshua linked his concern about immigration to his own political and national identity gained significance as he described the reasons why he joined the Minutemen, and why the Minutemen were needed. For Joshua, the Minutemen are engaged in but one fight in a broader struggle.

Well the goal is...persuading our leaders to do something about this illegal...this invasion of immigrants. Doing something to stop it and/or control it. Mexico doesn’t accept people across their borders. Why should we? Um, in fact they’re more against immigrants coming into their country from their southern border than we are from our southern border. And I don’t know how...I mean when you have these groups, [like the National Council of] La Raza, [Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán], and all of those groups—actually they talk about hate—well these groups hate us. These groups want to take back our country, take our land from us...but, uh, I think they are the hate groups. They hate white people, I mean as far as I’m concerned. Now I’m not speaking of all Mexicans. Don’t get me wrong. But you know the rate of Mexicans that are in prison in our country in relation to the Americans and so forth that are in prison is a pretty high rate especially when they still are a minority. At least in the overall picture they are.

According to Joshua, the goal of the Minutemen is to pressure lawmakers to stop an “invasion of immigrants.” For Joshua, the problem with immigration is the way it empowers Latino advocacy groups that he accuses of reverse racism. He then conflates reverse racism with his perceptions about the way that Mexicans are more prone to criminal behavior.

For Joshua illegal immigration was just a symptom of a deeper conspiracy to “destroy our nation as we know it.”

I believe in the constitution, and there's too many people out there trying to destroy it and destroy this nation from within without firing a shot. . . . They want to grant amnesty. They want to keep giving them money—taxpayer money. What right do they got to give our money to all of these people that are coming in illegally. The American people never signed off on anything like that. In fact they've already defeated a couple of attempts at amnesty. Why do they keep pushing it? It is a deliberate attempt to destroy our nation.

As Joshua explained it, anti-American forces, including the government and Mexicans and Latino advocacy groups, were combining with immigration and criminality to disempower white Americans. From Joshua's perspective, the government was illegitimately taking money from Americans, defined as taxpaying citizens, and giving it to a group of people who had not earned it and were thus not entitled to it.

Joshua's explanation hints at the way that MCC volunteers discussed race and concerns about race as they explained their involvement in the minuteman movement. In this chapter I explore the ways that members talked about immigration and its effects. Specifically, I discuss how members tied Latin American, and to a lesser extent Asian and Middle Eastern, immigration to the effects of globalization, higher proportions of minorities, urbanization, and the growing gap between rich and poor, as an indication of a radically changing America. Rather than focus on the biological aspects of racial difference, MCC members tied immigration to economic, political, environmental, and cultural change in ways that defined race in cultural terms. In speaking with MCC volunteers, it became clear that at the root of their concern over immigration was the perception that Latinos were making tremendous economic, political, and cultural gains at the expense of whites. I suggest that MCC volunteers constructed an image of immigration and immigrants as poor, criminal, and inherently different than U.S. citizens,

in ways that obscured the distinction between immigrants with different legal statuses and between immigrants and U.S. citizens of Latin American, Arabic, and Asian descent. Conversely, Minuteman volunteers crafted a sense of national identity that was tied to a white, engaged, conservative, taxpayer identity.

I begin with a brief review of contemporary anti-immigrant discourse highlighting some of the major themes. In so doing, I hope to provide the discursive and ideological context in which the Minutemen emerge. This is important because, as I will attempt to show in this and subsequent chapters, though the Minutemen are a direct outgrowth of a broader anti-immigrant movement that has its direct roots in the anti-immigrant efforts of the 1980s and 1990s, they have unique goals and participate in radically different activities. Next, I describe the types of changes that MCC members witnessed taking place at homes that made them first become concerned about immigration. I focus on three general themes: immigrants as poor and dependent upon government aid, immigrants as criminals and potential terrorists, and immigrants as racially distinct.

### Encounters with Change

Robin Dale Jacobsen (2008), in his excellent study of Anti-immigration activism prior to the passage of California's Proposition 187, argues that pro-187 activists were fundamentally engaged in an effort to reconstruct ideas about race. Jacobsen shows how the move to pass Prop 187 was guided by conservative ideas about race neutrality and color-blindness. Anti-immigration activists pointed to crime statistics, hospital closures and ballooning class sizes and state budgets as evidence of the perils of Latin American immigration without explicitly referring to racial difference. When confronted,

Proposition 187 supporters disavowed racism, highlighting the “race-neutrality” of law and order, making claims about minority support for the measure, and describing U.S. society as welcoming to newcomers (Jacobson 2008:25-27). According to Jacobson, Proposition 187 supporters viewed the measure as a way of creating a more fair society that was guided by the principals of color-blindness. Immigrants they argued were violating principals of fairness by breaking the law, relying on public assistance, and burdening taxpaying citizens.

However, as Jacobson describes, concerns about racial difference and antagonism were underlying concerns for Prop 187 supporters. Many of Jacobson’s participants believed that race riots and even a race war were inevitable (2008:33). They believed that if they failed to act now, “Hispanics could take over” (2008:34). Prop 187 supporters accused immigrants and their advocates of being the real racists.

Jacobson introduces the concept of bridging to help make sense of how anti-immigration activists could hold such seemingly contradictory positions about race. According to Jacobson, those who became anti-immigration activists did so by creating cognitive bridges between their color-blind and their racial realist perceptions. Prop 187 supporters created new conceptions of race that bridged race neutrality and race realism by erasing the distinction between Mexican identity, which was viewed as invasive, and undocumented migration. By linking Mexican identity with undocumented status, anti-immigration activists were able to focus their attacks on undocumented immigrants without making explicit reference to race. They were also able to flip accusations of racism on their head as they charged Latinos and Latino advocates of being the real racists.

As with the participants in Jacobson's studies, the Minutemen that I spoke with drew upon and crafted similar constructions of the concept of race. MCC members charged Latino immigrants with altering the economic, political, and cultural landscape in ways that made them feel disempowered. For the members of the MCC, these changes served as powerful motivation to join a group dedicated to limiting immigration from Latin America, the Middle East, and Asia. As Roger Patton, a member of the MCC's leadership group, explained to me, many members come down to the border because they saw the world around them changing. "They see the ratio between white and non-white shrinking," he said, and they felt the need to stop it. "So that may be the primary reason," he continued, "but then they get down here, see what's going on, and we flip 'em, or they're gone." Interestingly, Roger acknowledged that explicit concerns about race might be an important reason that folks get involved with the Minutemen. He even seems to suggest, that latent racism may be the reason why many members first decide to join a civilian border patrol group. However, he also expresses his confidence that the MCC can still channel that passion while defusing—or in his words, flipping—its racist intent. In fact, MCC members often expressed concerns about race, and constructed racialized categories of difference. In order to understand how MCC members distinguished the difference between white Americans and non-white foreign others, we can examine the specific concerns that MCC members cited when explaining their decision to join the Minuteman Corps of California.

In his book, *Above All Else*, Carl Braun (2007), the former head of the Minuteman Corps of California and the current leader of the Border Patrol Auxiliary, a spin-off organization that I discuss in Chapter 5, described the way that cultural and economic

changes in the communities near where he lived prompted him to learn more about Latin American immigration. Three general themes emerge from Braun's narrative. First, Latin American immigrants are pathologically poor. Braun describes Latin American poverty like a disease that is carried across the border and threatens to spread. What is more, Latinos drain public resources and are largely dependent on government assistance. Second, he associates high concentrations of Latinos with crime. Finally, Braun attributes high poverty and crime to immigrants' foreign identities. Not only are Latin American immigrants different from some unnamed norm, but also that difference is pathological and immutable.

For Braun, Border Patrol helicopters, bars on windows, and the prevalence of Spanish language advertising were particularly troubling signs of the dangers of immigration.

On first coming to California in 2003, I had no idea this issue even existed. It was way off of my radar screen until one day I ventured from my secluded island community of Coronado and drove a few miles south to Imperial Beach. Comparatively speaking, you would have thought I had just descended from Mount Olympus into the gates of hell. Border Patrol helicopters flew in a 24-hour racetrack pattern over the community and the Mexican border a mile or two further down the coast. There were bars on the windows and the billboards were nearly all in Spanish. Had someone dropped me there in the middle of the night and removed my blindfold, I would have immediately figured out which way was north and started heading for the US border. Only Imperial Beach was firmly inside the confines of the US already. As I journeyed into other communities nearby like Chula Vista and National City I was also struck by the poverty. English was very definitely a second language here and all it took was a trip to the local Home Depot or Costco to see how pervasive the language issue was. I was totally cool with people of another culture speaking their native language amongst themselves. After all, we do it and if I were to venture south to Mexico to work I am sure I would be expected to speak Spanish in public and English amongst other Americans. Trouble was, this wasn't Mexico, yet I was being forced to learn Spanish if I wanted to get along in these communities. That did bug me. Unlike the legal immigrants that preceded them, this illegal crowd had no interest in learning our language or assimilating into our culture. (Braun 2007:14-15)

Braun describes two neighboring communities that are worlds apart. He compares the island community of Coronado, home to a small, affluent, and predominantly white neighborhood (as well as a sizeable naval installation), to the house of the gods, and Imperial Beach and other parts of San Diego, with their Spanish language billboards and polyglot community, as hell. The presence of barred windows and the ubiquity of the Spanish language alert Braun to the dangers that these neighboring communities harbor. Nowhere in this passage does Braun mention “illegal” immigration. However, as he evokes the image of the Border Patrol helicopter in the context of his concerns over the negative impacts that foreign “Others” are having on neighboring communities, he implicitly equates codes of “otherness” with those of criminality and immigrant status. The result is an elision that masks the subject of his concern. Is the issue “illegal” immigration or all immigration? Is the concern limited to Spanish-speakers, or are all immigrants potentially problematic? Is it difference that concerns him, or a specific kind of difference?

Braun tries to clarify his position.

This by itself was striking but as an executive recruiter for most of my life, it wasn't the culture or even the language that disturbed me most.<sup>12</sup> It was the ambivalence that was alarming. Their willingness to bring the abject poverty and crime, akin to that in Tijuana, Managua or Bogota for example, WITH THEM, into the United States without reservation. Most people left one thing to achieve something better yet here I saw a group of people that just wanted to move their way of life to a new neighborhood where the government sponsored social benefits were better. (Braun 2007:15)

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Carl Braun specializes in minority hiring at the executive level.



For Braun, immigrants from Latin America were clearly different from other immigrant populations. The poverty that he views as endemic to Mexico, Nicaragua, and Colombia is also inherent. Latin Americans are unable or unwilling to alter their behaviors that result in poverty; instead they come to the United States for the sole purpose of accessing public benefits.

After encountering the apparent effects of immigration, he decided to learn more.

The more I read, the more incensed I became with the lunacy of it all. For me, I also saw a different side of the equation. The roughly 5-8 million jobs that the other “undocumented workers” were filling outside of agriculture, were jobs once held by urban youth, college students and early career folks, many of whom were minorities and all of whom were here legally. It just wasn’t right. (Braun 2007:19)

For Braun it was the encounter with high concentrations of Latinos that made “illegal” immigration more visible. Moreover, he identified a society in flux, where jobs once held by American citizens were now being taken by non-citizens who were not entitled to reside in the United States let alone obtain work. This concern ultimately spurred his desire to learn more and to get involved with the Minutemen.

To demonstrate the perils of undocumented immigration, Braun presents a bulleted list of statistics from a variety of sources including the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR), the Federal Bureau of Prison Statistics, the Government Accountability Office, the Pew Hispanic Resource Center, and an academic article by Madeleine Cosman. The list claims that “illegal aliens” make up more than 27% of the prison population in the United states, that one out of five “illegals” are guilty of felonies, that between four and nine percent of migrant workers are employed in agriculture, and that California spent over \$10 billion per year on medical and social services for “illegal”

aliens resulting in the closure of 84 hospitals (Braun 2007:18).<sup>13</sup> By tying these statistics with his experience of cultural and demographic change in the communities near where he lives, Braun erases the distinction between documented migration and undocumented migration and between immigrants and Latinos and ties both to criminality, government dependence, poverty, and cultural difference. Rather than altering his perception, reading about immigration merely justified his beliefs, but it did so by providing new reasons for opposing undocumented immigration that did not directly and overtly reference race.

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<sup>13</sup> According to the Federal Bureau of Prison Statistics (Federal Bureau of Statistics 2011) 74 percent of inmates are U.S. citizens. Of the remaining 26% the Bureau of Prison Statistics does not identify an inmate's immigration status (documented or undocumented). Braun also cites a GAO report (GAO 05-646R) stating that one in five undocumented immigrants were guilty of felonies. The GAO report draws on data gathered on incarcerated immigrants that ICE had determined had entered the United States without authorization and were in the country without authorization at the time of their arrest. The sample includes a little over 55,000 inmates or less than one half of one percent of the entire undocumented population. The report details aggregate statistics about the total and average number of arrests of the sample, how many and what type of offenses they were arrested for, and in what state they were arrested. The report does not differentiate between felonies and misdemeanors, instead quantifying all criminal offenses from murder and rape to public intoxication and disturbing the peace. It is unclear which Pew Hispanic Center Report Braun is referencing, however, in the March 2005 "Report on the Size and Characteristics of the Undocumented Population" Jeffery Passel estimates that there were less than 11 million undocumented immigrants in the United States. The report does not break down employment statistics based on industry, so it is unclear where the percentages come from. However, even if the raw number of 1.8 million is correct, it would represent roughly 16 percent of the undocumented population not the four to six percent that he claims. In a separate report that issued statistics on "Attitudes about Immigration and Major Demographic Characteristics" (Suro 2005) of Mexican migrants who were surveyed as they applied for identity cards at Mexican consulates. According to this report, 8% of the individuals surveyed reported that they worked in agriculture. The Federation for American Immigration Reform report (2004) that Braun cites almost certainly overestimates the fiscal impact of undocumented immigration, because the report includes children born in the United States from undocumented parents in its calculations. Also, the report associates education, not health care with the highest cost as a result of undocumented immigration (\$7.7 billion annually from K-12 education and \$1.4 billion from health care). Finally, Braun cites an article by Madeleine Cosman (2005) that states that 84 hospitals closed as a result of being overburdened by uninsured "illegal aliens." However, Cosman does not provide evidence that supports that statistic. The lone newspaper report that she cites indicates that since the 1980s, 18 emergency rooms have closed their doors, a far cry from the 84 that Cosman claims have had to shut their doors due to "illegal" patients (Chong 2004). What is more, the article makes no mention of the impact of "illegal immigrants" on hospitals, instead it attributes the closure of the RFK Medical Center to new legislation that required. Moreover, though undocumented immigrants are more likely to rising costs of nurses and state-mandated renovations on the hospital's facilities. Moreover, though undocumented immigrants are more likely to lack health insurance and thus may be unable to pay for medical services, there is research that suggests that immigrants use medical services at much lower rates than U.S. citizens, and are actually less likely to use emergency rooms than citizens (Cunningham 2006; McConville and Lee 2008).

As the former head of the MCC and current member of the MCC's leadership group, Braun maintains a highly influential position within the organization. As the following examples will show, most, if not all, MCC members explained their decision to join the Minutemen by referencing some or all of the same themes that Carl Braun did. MCC members explained their concern over immigration by tying non-white immigration to poverty and government dependence, crime, terrorism, and in turn associated these changes with broader cultural changes that they described in racial terms.

#### Poverty and Government Dependence

Russell Grant, a retiree of Irish descent, shared Carl Braun's experience of moving to California and suddenly being confronted with high concentrations of Latinos. Like Carl, Russel equated Latinos, specifically Mexicans, with poverty and equated the category "Mexican" with "illegal" and "poor." Also like Braun, Russell referenced the changing ethnic and racial composition of the poor. They both observed Latinos replacing blacks and other minorities in the lowest paying jobs.

Moving here from back east I was sort of all of a sudden confronted with a lot of Latinos, and Mexicans to be specific. And it was like we would experience back east with blacks. There would be a large concentration of them and you could see that they were less than—I don't know what the right word is—fortunate... You would see them in the jobs that were low paying and you would see them you know—you wouldn't see them in the more expensive stores. You wouldn't see them in movie theaters you know. But you would see that they were less fortunate. And so when I got out here it switched. You know, it went from blacks being the lower culture or wage...levels, to the Mexicans.

For the members of the MCC, immigrant poverty was a highly visible sign of a society that was spinning out of control. Another white volunteer with Irish ancestry

named Tara linked undocumented immigration and poverty explicitly. For Tara, Mexican immigrants brought “Third World” poverty with them.

I think that first of all it's been so out of control we need to be realistic about it. Our infrastructure can't support this many people. Especially when you're talking they're bringing Third World poverty with them. It's not that they're assimilating they're bringing it with them. Anybody with eyes, drive around and look at the *barrios*. Look in these neighborhoods that are primar[ily] illegals. What do they look like? Do they look American? They look like you're in Mexico. Now if they wanted a better life why do they insist on maintaining the same one? You tell me why? I would be wanting to better it and you know taking the steps in order to do it. Not maintaining the same thing they're claiming to escape from. So to me it's an argument that doesn't fly. I think that there needs to be a moratorium on all immigration until they get a grip on it. Right now we don't need it. Unemployment is way too high and our social system can't absorb all of this. Americans are going without. Systems that they paid into, been forced to pay into all their lives, because it's being handed to people that shouldn't be here.

Tara blames immigrants for the loss of control that she has witnessed. Like Braun, she describes particular neighborhoods as more “Mexican” than “American,” but she does so without reference to the physical characteristics of the neighborhood. Rather, she defines non-American neighborhoods based on who lives in them. Tara points to “obvious” visual cues, specifically “Third World poverty,” that she sees in neighborhoods that are “home to illegals.” We are meant to understand that the poverty that Latino immigrants experience is different from other forms of poverty and is tied primarily to their foreign identity. Even though Tara describes the poverty that she associates with Latin American immigrants and “illegals” as endemic, she also hints that it is something that can spread.

For the men and women of the MCC, signs of a changing world around them prompted their desire to get involved. As with Braun, their activism was a product of *seeing* change, difference, and disintegration. Tara explained how these observed changes motivated her to join the MCC. Notice how Tara moves from a discussion of assimilation

to one about rights, namely the unearned rights and privileges that she believes immigrants possess that “we” do not.

[I became involved] because I could see what was happening around me and how out of control it was...from, you know just strictly from an economic way of life, cultural way of life...And I love other cultures but that’s why I travel to their countries and embrace ‘em, and never tried to enforce [sic] mine onto them. I would respect and honor whatever laws whatever morays—social morays—any of that, while I was there, and loved it. Appreciated it. That was what I enjoyed most about it—experiencing their culture. And to come in and say. . . you know, to me it’s just unthinkable you go in and you just milk the system and that’s what’s happening. It’s outta control... [The] melting pot was when people came here, wanted to be Americans, wanted to be productive. Just the phrase itself melting pot means they assimilated and it all became a big melting pot. Now it’s not. They’re maintaining this. Nothing melts together. And it’s balkanization. And I think that’s created a big problem—an arrogance. They’ve been told they’re entitled because well they got here. And they have more rights than we do. And that’s wrong.

Tara points to immigrants “milking the system,” failing to assimilate, and stealing jobs as a loss of control. What is interesting about Tara’s comments is the way that she equates immigrants’ dependence on social services with a refusal to assimilate and integrate into an American “way of life.” For Tara, immigrants are ineligible for membership in the national imaginary in part because of their perceived dependence on the government.

For some MCC members, preventing immigration and thus preventing immigrants from accessing public service was as simple as prioritizing one’s family over a stranger’s. For one such member stopping “Mexican” immigration was necessary to ensure that Americans would have access to jobs and other resources.

I’m not a racist. I have nothing against the people. I just—family first, you know. Basically—I don’t know if you have children—when you do have children, you’re gonna want them to be able to grow up and have jobs and be able to get hospitalization and get food, and not watch all these illegal Mexicans sitting on their butts—or illegal anyone, or any bums, anyone. They’re sitting there, they don’t wanna work. So you know you’re paying for it. So your kids don’t get that much to eat ‘cause you have to feed all of them. That kinda pisses you off. Even

just you and your wife now—but when you get kids too you’re really gonna wanna tighten up.

As I once overheard one MCC member say to another, “I’d pay for your healthcare.”

Members of the MCC did not object in principal to a government that provided education, health care, jobs, or other benefits to citizens. Nor did MCC members completely object to aiding others. Rather, MCC members insisted that government services go to American citizens that had “earned it.” In short, MCC members believed that government services should go to people like them.

At the same time, MCC members often expressed compassion for the plight of poor migrants whom they viewed as merely seeking a better life. One member expressed feeling sorry for a group of migrants that he saw crossing the border.

They were a pitiful bunch. You know I feel sorry for them. Those folks are being abused. I bear them—we bear them no ill will. Those people, most of them are decent people. They know less than we do, I think. And they’re being victimized. But they can’t come here. We should help them to help themselves. I don’t know send them food and money, except in the case of dire need. You can’t make more entitlement people out of them, just as we have with our own underclass here. That is a terrible thing to do. It saps the will to work. It saps personal responsibility. It makes people into serfs—into serfs.

Another member shared this same sense of compassion. He explained to me that if he or any other Minuteman ever came across a person in the desert who was under duress and needed help, that they would absolutely provide whatever was needed, water, food, clothing, blankets, first-aid, to help. He asked me if I had seen a rape tree. He said that you find these trees in the desert, with women’s underwear hung on the branches. The *coyotes* rape the women that they are supposed to be guiding, and then hang their underwear as a kind of trophy. It’s disgusting, he exclaimed. We know they are not to blame, he said, referring to poor migrants. “It’s not their fault that Bush invited them in.”

Whether MCC members accused undocumented immigrants of being pathologically lazy and dependent upon government aid, or hardworking victims, MCC members used the image of the “illegal immigrant” as a way of articulating their own identities as “taxpayers,” “conservatives,” “citizens,” and “patriots” in ways that referenced racial codes, but buried them behind more race neutral language. Similarly, undocumented immigrants, who they believed paid little to no tax or illegitimately siphoned public resources, were identified with work or dependence, two categories long used to exclude immigrants (Ngai 2004; Roediger 2007; Zolberg 2006), and that also referenced race implicitly.

Most MCC members shared this ambivalence toward clandestine border crossers. MCC members had first hand experience of some of the dangers that clandestine border crossers experienced. MCC members saw the rape trees. They climbed over rocks, through the migrant trails, and the brush. They experienced the rapid shifts in temperature. Nevertheless, clandestine migrants were breaking the law, and were, in the minds of MCC members, contributing to economic decline and growing lawlessness.

### Crime

The only way it would ever be mission accomplished is if I felt that everybody that I saw was legal and had the same responsibilities and accepted the same responsibilities as I do to pay their insurance, to drive carefully, to protect women and children. But you know those people out there I just resent them so much. It just gets to me. It makes me so mad ‘cause I know there’s no solution and if there was a solution we’re so far from it. So I’ll die five or ten years . . . or tomorrow, but I’ll never see it where I feel it was when I was a kid. Where people cared (and) you didn’t have to lock your doors and stuff like that. That’s what happens when you get old, Devin, you long for the security of the old days. We don’t have any security now. We don’t have any right and wrong. It just doesn’t matter. Oh but they just want to come and find a job. Well no they don’t. They want to take a piece of what we have that we worked so hard for.

Russell Grant worked a lot of jobs throughout his life. He tried to become a police officer as a young man in New York, but a bout of tuberculosis as a teenager disqualified him from the service. He worked as a plumber, carpenter, and in other building trades instead. He took the test to become a Border Patrol agent when he was in his twenties. He passed, but his score was not high enough to secure a spot with the agency. He never gave up his dream to work in law enforcement, and he eventually became a university police officer in Virginia. He is retired now. He supplements his retirement income by buying homes, living in them for a few years, and then selling them at a profit.

Russell describes himself as a “right or wrong” kind of guy. For Russell there is only black or white, no shade of gray. Though he understood why poor migrants crossed the Mexico-U.S. border, he could not tolerate it. They were breaking the law. Immigrants drove without drivers’ licenses, without insurance, and did not pay attention to the rules of the road. Undocumented immigration was part of what he saw as the breakdown of security and safety. No longer could you leave your door unlocked. No longer could you trust your neighbors. Like the burglar or the thief, immigrants, in Russell’s opinion, were intent on taking what he and others like him had earned. Russell’s comments illustrate, in small part, the way that the Minutemen linked immigration with crime and lawlessness.

Inside the Communications Center at Camp Vigilance, there is a sign nailed to the wall next to the door. It reads: “Calling an illegal alien an “undocumented immigrant” is like calling a drug dealer an “unlicensed pharmacist.” MCC volunteers often tied undocumented immigration, which they defined as a crime, to other forms of lawlessness such as drug and people smuggling, identity theft and document fraud, and gangs. For many MCC members, narratives of criminality motivated their desire to join the MCC



and participate in border watch operations. MCC members believed that “illegal” immigrants were already, by definition, criminals. Protecting the border was thus primarily a way to protect the “rule of law.” However, MCC members constructed immigration narratives that implicitly and explicitly tied undocumented immigration to other forms of criminality in ways that erased the distinction between undocumented and documented immigrants and between immigrants and Latin Americans and other “unwanted” foreign “others.”

The Minuteman Civil Defense Corps, the parent organization of the Minuteman Corps of California, described itself as “the nation’s largest neighborhood watch” (MCDC 2008). For many MCC volunteers, the presence of large populations of undocumented migrants reflected a break down in the rule of law. Margie Cuthbert, who worked in the publishing industry, and described her ethnicity as “Heinz 57”<sup>14</sup> first decided to join the Minutemen because of a concern about drugs. For Margie, whose grandson was addicted to Oxycontin, the flow of drugs from Mexico into the United States made her want to join the Minutemen. Concerns about “criminal aliens,” also motivated her desire to join the Minutemen.

One in five [illegals] are hardened criminals. This is not good. We don’t need them here. Course we’ve got enough on our own. So I learned more about it. I get more into it. I get more adamant that its gotta stop. I get more emotionally involved in it now because of that. Like I said at first I was emotionally involved in my grandson. But I figure if I could do my one cent worth to stop some drugs from coming in. But now I want to stop the people as much as the drugs.

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<sup>14</sup> “Heinz 57” is a colloquialism that refers to one’s ethnic makeup. The Heinz company manufactures a number of food products and is famous for its slogan of “57 varieties.” The slogan refers to the number of products that the company produces, but is often misinterpreted to mean 57 ingredients in its tomato catsup. When speaking ethnically, Heinz 57 refers to someone who is racially white but whose ancestors were from a variety of white ethnic backgrounds.

As they did with poverty, MCC members described immigrant crime as a disease that was spreading. One member described immigrant crime as an invasion. The link between undocumented immigrants and criminality was so concrete for some MCC members, that it was impossible to separate the two.

The situation has gotten where you have hard core criminals entrenched in our society. It's not just immigration. It's full on invasion by bad guys. And it's been allowed to be so easy for them to commit crimes here, go back across the border, come back under a different name. . . . You know by looking at them they look like the humble peasant coming over to pick vegetables and they've got a felony record as long as your arm. Several names wanted (for) outstanding warrants. So what do you do? People say, oh you can't they're just poor people looking for a better life. You know, so a bank robber can say that. Do bank robbers get to say well you can't take me to prison because you'll separate my family. Where do you draw the line?

In the preceding example it is hard to tell if the speaker is concerned with felons using groups of migrants as a way of entering the country illegally, or if migrant groups are entirely comprised of felons. The crime of undocumented immigration, thus becomes analogous to other more serious crimes such as bank robbery. Regardless of their reasons for crossing, all clandestine border crossers are “bad guys.”

Teresea Caldeira (2000), in her study of fortified enclaves in São Paulo, Brazil, illustrates some of the power and significance of crime narratives. She writes:  
ce of crime narratives. She writes:

Crime supplies a generative symbolism with which to talk about other things that are perceived as wrong or bad, but for which no consensus of interpretation or vocabulary may exist. It also offers symbolism with which to talk about other kinds of loss, such as downward mobility. Moreover, crime adds drama to the narration of events that themselves may be undramatic—for example, a forty-year process of change in a neighborhood—but whose consequences can be distressing (Caldeira 2000:34).

Crafting crime narratives within the context of immigration allowed MCC members to express racial anxieties about growing populations of Latinos without specifically referencing them. Talk about crime “[reduced] a complex, disorderly reality to a few, essentialized categories that elaborate prejudices, at the same time as they give the narrator a means to organize the world and gain a sense of control” (Maher 2005:289).

In her study of gated communities in Orange County, Kristen Maher suggests that talk of crime “focused attention on the physical boundary of the neighborhood, making it a site of anxiety about control” (2005:289). In her study, white residents acknowledged that crime was virtually non-existent in their neighborhoods, and what little crime that did occur was the result of resident youth. Nevertheless, they advocated erecting fences and gates as a way of maintaining control over their neighborhoods and easing their anxieties about changes that were taking place outside of their community. Residents referenced large proportions of Latinos (and crime) in neighboring communities and expressed anxiety about it “spilling” over into their neighborhood (Maher 2005).

Similarly, MCC members “talked” about crime as a way of explaining their involvement. In so doing they projected the boundaries of their community onto the international border and thus extended the boundaries of their own community. MCC members also used talk of crime (among other things) to construct cultural and ideological boundaries. Not only did talking about crime focus attention on and project the physical dimensions of their neighborhoods, but it also focused attention on the cultural boundaries of their neighborhoods.

### Terrorism

Though MCC members referenced general anxieties about crime, when they did focus on specific types of crime, terrorism was referenced more often than others. Although MCC musters consisted primarily of conducting border watch operations, the MCC also hosted weapon, tracking, first aid, and other kinds of trainings. In April of 2009, they hosted a seminar on radical Islam. The seminar was conducted by a Lebanese man who was a volunteer sheriff in Orange County and a friend of one of the Minutemen. I present an account of his presentation and the reaction that it garnered by the Minutemen to show how the Minutemen conceived of terrorism and how they tied it to immigration.

It is important to note that the speaker was not a member of the MCC. Rather, he was invited by an MCC member to give a presentation on the threat of radical Islam. Abu Moussa, a pseudonym that he used, was born in the Middle East to a Catholic father and Protestant mother. He is one of nine kids. He owns an auto parts store and is a volunteer Sheriff in Orange County. His expertise in radical Islam, he said, was derived from having read the Quran in Arabic and in his experience growing up in the Middle East.

MCC members as well as eight to ten members of other local Minuteman organizations attended the event that took place at a clubhouse located at the RV Park next to Camp Vigilance. The clubhouse consisted of a single room. A lone foldable table sat at the front of the room. The MCC placed a projector on it and attached a laptop computer. Two white-topped picnic tables were stacked on their sides at the front of the room to serve as a projection screen. A full kitchen including stove, refrigerator, sink, microwave, and cabinets occupied the back wall. Soda and snack vending machines stood

on one side of the room, and on the other a pinball table and magazine rack stood. White plastic seats and a sofa and loveseat were laid out in rows facing the front of the room.

We all made the short walk over to the clubhouse from Camp Vigilance in less than ten minutes. We sat around the room facing forward. Margie introduced the guest speaker as a “world-renowned” terrorism expert. The guest speaker asked us to refer to him as Abu Moussa. He said that we were welcome to take notes, but we could not take pictures. He said that if any Muslims learned of his identity he could be killed.

His slideshow presentation consisted of cherry-picked passages from the Quran that purported to reveal the evils of Islam and its link to terrorism. As he spoke he slowly and theatrically put his hand in a clear, plastic food service glove. With his gloved hand, he then picked up a green hard cover book that had Arabic script on the cover and along the spine. “This is terrorism,” he said.

“Why the glove?” an audience member asked.

“I didn’t want to soil my hand,” Abu Moussa responded with a smile.

He then identified the book as the Quran.

“All terrorists are Muslims and all Muslims will be terrorists at some time,” he said. According to Abu Moussa, there is no such thing as radical or fanatical Islam. Terrorism, he said, is not Al Qaeda, Hezbollah, or Hamas. “Terrorism is Islam.”

In a radio interview conducted that evening by Carl Braun for his Internet radio program, Abu Moussa elaborated on his claims about Islam and nationalism. In the interview he called Islam a form of government.

There is a huge misconception about Islam and Muslims. Muslims are people like all others. They love peace. However, peace to them is what their Bible teaches which is the Quran, which is when Islam takes over all the nations and then peace

will then reign. Islam has always been a form of government. The Quran is the constitution. That is why Muslims call for the Sharia law. You know what is Sharia law? It is the Quran itself. That is Sharia law. . . . But we have to remember one thing, a Muslim is very, very faithful to his constitution or to his Quran or to Islam. They do not recognize any other form of government or law basically. It's very offensive to them. They only want to go under their own Sharia law, which is the Quran itself.

All Muslims, according to Abu Moussa maintained loyalty solely to Islam and could thus not be trusted to respect American laws or social morays. This led Carl Braun to wonder why they would seek to come to the United States at all.

At the meeting, a member of the audience asked if Muslims can be loyal to any government that is not an Islamic nation. A second and a third audience member shouted in near unison, "No." Abu Moussa responded that they are all Muslims and all Muslims are or will be radical because the Quran requires it.

In his interview, Abu Moussa declared that the spread of Islam was the ultimate goal of all Muslims. Immigrating to the United States was part of that plan.

Abu Moussa: Muslims will come to this country legally and illegally. Legally to start their families that I call "mass reproduction." It's multiplication. They will become a majority. Thus the verse that says in the Quran "immigrate in the way of Allah." It means immigrate for the sake of Allah. And then with four wives that are allowed at one time, all the time, they can—the population will explode.

Carl Braun: And this is in the Quran as you say as well? It is for them to multiply, for by multiplication they will take over a particular area?

AM: Here is . . . why would they come illegally. They can't come legally. I'll tell you why. Any Muslim that says overseas in (the) Arab world "I have been persecuted," our government is very generous. They will give them a visa to immigrate. However those who don't come legally they come through the border. These have already chosen *jihad*. These people are very adamant and they're totally dedicated to do their dirty job.

CB. So in other words they're not coming here to pick strawberries. . . . So the folks coming here illegally are more than likely not coming here because they want to come to work; they're not coming here because family is here. They're

coming here because they are engaged in some kind of holy *jihad*. Is that what you're saying?

AM: They definitely are because you see all Muslims are ordered by the Quran to do the *jihad*. All of them with no exception except the sick who can't fight et cetera. Only those.

According to Abu Moussa, all Muslims, regardless of their immigration status, are guided by religious motives to overwhelm Christian nations and transform them into a Muslim majority. Documented Muslim immigrants seek a majority through reproduction and undocumented Muslim immigrants seek a majority through killing Americans.

During his presentation, Abu Moussa described what the Quran says happens after you die. He also listed what he claimed were Quranic directives about killing infidels and *jihad*. In all, the presentation described all Muslims as radical terrorists bent on the destruction of all non-Muslims and non-Muslim nations.

At the end of the presentation, Abu Moussa presented a slide that asked, "So, what is the solution." The next slide, in large red letters, said "We have to kill them." Abu Moussa, did not read the words. When they appeared on the screen there was a brief silence, as if the whole room had taken a collective breath. The silence was broken by a male voice that said, "I can get behind that." Scattered and subdued laughter followed. Then another member said that we could form the Tea-N-Tea party. More laughter. Another voice rang out "Blow up Muslims until they go back to Mecca." No one objected to the directive or to the comments that followed. The closest anyone came to criticizing the suggestion to kill Muslims was when someone responded, "that's not very politically correct." As the chatter died down, the audience applauded Abu Moussa and one of the

heads of the MCC got up and presented Abu Moussa with a BPAUX hat and shirt and an MCDC shirt.

I left the clubhouse and made my way back to Camp Vigilance. I was shaken by the presentation and by the lack of a critical response by anyone in the audience. As I walked back from the clubhouse, a member caught up with me. We walked in silence for a few minutes until he asked, “so was that racist?” I felt relief. Perhaps I wasn’t the only one who was disturbed by the presentation. I figured surely he shared my sense of horror about that presentation.

I responded, “Absolutely.”

“But it was about religion. How could it be racist?” he asked.

I was momentarily dumbstruck by the question. I guess he had a point. Abu Moussa never made any overt reference to race. He never called Muslims by any derogatory names. “I think that when you advocate killing an entire group of people, you are talking about more than just religion,” I said, not really knowing how to answer the question. I was disturbed, distraught, and disappointed.

Another member of the MCC, a schoolteacher joined us. The other MCC member asked her if she thought that the presentation had been racist. “No, I don’t think it was racist.” She paused. “Because it was all factual, right.”

In that simple twist, changing the terms of the debate, my two Minuteman companions were able to justify genocide. After all, all Muslims were intent on genocide in their own right, according to Abu Moussa. The day’s event illustrated the high level of tolerance of both covert and overt forms of racist speech at Camp Vigilance. That the discussion revolved around a religious group that was already viewed as a foreign and



dangerous group, made it safe to talk about, joke about, and accept fantasies of violence directed at Muslims. When one of the heads of the MCC and BPAUX presented Abu Moussa with BPAUX and MCC gear, he was not only thanking Abu Moussa, but also implicitly sanctioning his beliefs. This was a powerful symbolic act.

MCC volunteers often insisted that radical Islamists were gaining entry into the United States by crossing undetected over the Mexico-U.S. border. In *Above All Else*, Carl Braun recounts an operation where three non-Spanish speaking individuals crossed near a team of Minutemen. The MCC members that spotted the trio crossing the border said that the language sounded like Arabic. A member who was stationed in Iraq as a soldier in the Marines confirmed that the language was Arabic. Following protocol, the radio operator at Camp Vigilance called the Border Patrol. “We never heard BP respond nor did we see them,” Braun recounted. “The only thing we know is that three weeks later the government made a passing reference in a hearing that DHS had captured Al Qaeda operatives along the Southern border three weeks earlier. We have not been able to confirm if it was our guys” (Braun 2007:52).

Tara claimed to have personally stopped Arabs from crossing the border without authorization. “I do know of the groups that I’ve stopped, there’ve been Arabs in there. Who knows what they were up to. We know Hezbollah, Hamas have come across, Al Qaeda. They may have been that.”

I asked, “And how do you know those groups have come across?”

“Well, I’ve seen ‘em. There’s two Arabs in one group of twelve I’ve stopped. Others were persons of interest. Big interest. So who knows what they were up to what was

stopped there. I'll never know. That's OK as that's at a personal level. Like I said, going back to what I said before, who knows I may have stopped that one child molester."

It was interesting the way that Tara shifted from talking about Arabs who may or may not have been members of a "terrorist" organization, to pondering the likelihood that she may have stopped a "child molester." Tara conflates terrorism with other kinds of crime against innocents. For Tara, participating in efforts to stop terrorism prevent other kinds of illicit and potentially violent activity. Together, Tara and Carl participate in crafting the same narrative that Abu Moussa did in his presentation: ethnicity, religion, and their country of origin combine to make Arabs and Muslims ineligible for membership in the national imaginary.

Minuteman volunteers did not equate terrorism exclusively with Arabs and/or Muslims, however. They also used terrorism as a way of further positioning Latinos outside the national imaginary. "I believe that these people that promote illegal traffic are also promoting terrorism," one member explained to me.

David West, a member of MCC and BPAUX even defined the primary mission of the Border Patrol Auxiliary to prevent weapons of mass destruction and terrorists from crossing the border illegally. Though David appeared to narrow the MCC's mission, he did so by expanding the definition of terrorism.

Well what's the definition of a terrorist? Well any knucklehead out in the—I shouldn't say knucklehead—any body, human body out in the middle of nowhere in the middle of the night in the middle of the day in the United States that is not there legally. I mean to me a potential terrorist it could be a young woman—an 18 year old carrying a sexually transmitted disease. I mean you know that, to me, is an act of terrorism: coming into this country not going through a health screening process and potentially spreading some kind of communicable disease.

Again, we see how disease and crime become integrally linked to one another without overt reference to the ethnicity of the perpetrator. David makes it clear that anyone who not only crosses into the United States, but also who is present without authorization is a terrorist. It is important to understand that by using an STD-carrying teenager as an example of terrorism he is expanding the definition of terrorism, not clarifying or qualifying it. By making veiled reference to the border (“out in the middle of nowhere”) he is also making veiled reference to Mexican and Latin Americans who, as we have seen are often referenced in such coded language. David thus shifts the issue of immigration from a question of poor migrants seeking a better way of life to dangerous individuals intent on committing violence against Americans. To use Carl Braun’s language, these are not just a bunch of strawberry pickers trying to enter the United States. To use Jacobson’s language here, David “bridges” racial concerns about Arabic and Mexican immigration with apparently race neutral concerns over terrorism.

If we consider David’s narrative within the context of Abu Moussa’s presentation, expanding the definition of terrorism can prompt radically violent repercussions. Herein lies the true danger of equating undocumented migration with terrorism. Terrorism is a violent act that targets civilians as a means of achieving a political end. The War on Terror has justified an entire catalog of violent reactions to punish confirmed and suspected practitioners of terrorism, including preemptive violence, torture, targeted assassination, and perpetual imprisonment. Abu Moussa’s directive to kill all Muslims, and the uncritical acceptance of such a directive by MCC volunteers, is thus not surprising.

But when we place the MCC's expressed concerns with terrorism within the context of other stated reasons it becomes clear that though there was a genuine anti-Muslim sentiment that permeated throughout the group, discussing the potential threat of terrorism was an important way to justify their opposition to undocumented immigration from Mexico and Latin America. In other words, very real anti-Muslim sentiment was used by MCC members as a way of creating support for their near exclusive attempts to stop Mexican and Latin American migration.

### Cultural Change

Immigrant criminality, poverty, and government dependence were powerful reasons given by MCC members for their opposition to documented and undocumented immigration from Latin America and from other non-white geographic regions. Combined they reflected the dramatic threat that mass migration posed to the cultural and political makeup of the United States. Abu Moussa and Carl Braun's discussion of Islam as a form of government made clear how they conflated issues of religious and cultural difference with political and moral difference. Similarly MCC discussions of poverty and immigrant/"Mexican" communities further conflated economic difference with cultural and moral difference. Cultural difference replaced racial difference in the Minutemen's discussion of the perils of immigration. Rather than erase the importance of race, however, the Minutemen were actually engaged in the reconfiguration of racial codes of difference.

The cultural differences between MCC members and non-white persons whom they identified as "illegal" were such that even seemingly innocuous encounters with

“illegals” prompted them to get involved in fighting “illegal” immigration. An MCC member named Darren decided to “serve his country,” as he put it, and join the Minutemen because of an encounter that he had with a Latino couple at his home. Darren was sitting in the living room of his apartment in Los Angeles when he heard a knock on the door. When he opened the door, standing in his doorway were a man, a young woman who he assumed was his wife, and their child. He described the family as “illegal.” They didn’t speak English, and he didn’t speak Spanish, he told me, but after a while he came to understand that the man’s wife had lost her wedding ring. They wanted to know if he had seen it. He communicated to them that he hadn’t and they went on their way. After the encounter, he thought to himself, “how dare they.” How dare they come into this country and not learn to speak English. It was then that he decided that he wanted to do something. His voice trailed off and he left unsaid what that “something” was. Why would such a seemingly innocuous encounter result in such a strong feeling of incredulity and outrage?

“Language panics” (Hill 2000) are a common feature of recent history throughout the United States, but especially in California. In 1998, California voters overwhelmingly passed Proposition 227, which virtually eliminated bilingual education in public schools. After its passage, non-English speaking students were taught primarily in English. As Hill has discussed, language panics are not really about language, but are about race.

In the run up to the vote, the law’s proponents launched what was a very technical matter, “precisely what mix of mother tongue and target language in the primary school classroom makes for the most effective student achievement?” (Hill 2000:249) into a national, spectacular, and politically charged debate about the health of our schools and

communities. The debate largely omitted and often rejected scientific research and expert opinions. Moreover, proponents supported the law based on a belief that not only did bilingual education prohibit students from learning English, but that it unfairly rewarded minority educators. For example, bilingual teachers were demonized for receiving bonuses as compensation for their specialized skill. Prop. 227 supporters saw the bonuses as an “unwarranted minority privilege” (Hill 2000:255).

Individuals often express their opposition to the use of Spanish in public spaces by raising the specter of national disunity, balkanization, and social unrest and upheaval. Proponents of English-only initiatives claim that linguistic diversity inhibits the assimilation of immigrant groups and “threatens political cohesion and stability” (Citrin et al 1990:538). In this sense, support of English as the official public language is, in part, based on negative sentiments directed at racialized minorities (Hill 2000). Support for English-only initiatives is also partly based on a positive attachment to symbols of national identity (Citrin et al. 1990:549-550).

Darren’s reaction to his neighbors’ inability to speak Spanish likely reflected both impulses. His encounter with non-English speakers at his home represented an intrusion of “otherness” into his private space. Darren drew upon anti-immigrant discourse that accused non-English speaking immigrants of willfully refusing to adopt the English language and thus adopt an “American” identity. Instead, they maintained their difference and imposed that difference onto his private space. That this encounter prompted him to “serve his country” by joining the Minutemen reflects the way that codes of nationalism and patriotism are tied to the issue of official English.

Darren's reasons for joining the Minutemen were expressed in cultural terms that masked any concern for race. Occasionally, however, MCC members made explicit reference to racial anxieties. On one such occasion, a group of three to four MCC volunteers were sitting around the meeting room in the stagecoach depot discussing why there appeared to be so many "illegals" working in the United States. The group had been trying to understand why businesses hired "illegals" instead of "white" workers. One member of the group stated that "illegals" do the work that white teenagers used to do. Another quickly responded that white teenagers can no longer get these jobs even if they wanted them.

"Contractors won't hire white kids because they don't speak Spanish," he said.

Another speaker suggested that they should get together a large group of "American" teens, like a thousand, and get them to work in construction.

"Where are you going to get a thousand white people? We can't even...the most we've ever had was fifty down here," another contested.

"There aren't any white kids that want construction jobs?" he replied

In this example, "Americans" and "white" people are used interchangeably to describe a group of people that have become ineligible to work in construction. Similarly, the group used "Spanish speakers" and "illegals" interchangeably to identify a group that is taking jobs away from "white Americans." Though Spanish is a language that can be learned, it is presented here as an immutable, and thus a racialized, trait. White teens are described as victims of discrimination at the hands of construction contractors and Spanish speaking workers in much the same way that English-speaking teachers were in the debate over bilingual education. When one speaker complains about their inability to

get more than 50 “white people” to attend Minuteman activities, he too positions himself in contrast to Spanish-speaking illegals, thus identifying himself and the MCC as white.

This example hints at the reasons why Darren was so upset about his encounter with the Spanish speaking couple. The couples’ inability to speak English signaled to Darren their non-whiteness. Though the couple was not engaging in any overtly discriminatory activities, by virtue of being present, and refusing to speak English, they likely reminded Darren of the threat to white America that Spanish-speaking immigrants posed. Darren’s experiences and the conversation between MCC volunteers are familiar when we consider them in comparison to Jacobson’s study of Prop 187 activists. Both groups of activists linked Mexican migration to racialized codes of fairness and justice that emphasized white harm at the hands of non-white immigrants.

### Political Change

Darren’s feelings about the possibility of amnesty for undocumented immigrants further revealed his concerns about the threat to whiteness that Latin American immigration posed. He explained to me that if amnesty passed, “No white person will ever get elected again.” Many members shared Darren’s concern. For a brief time, MCC leaders jokingly suggested that they refer to undocumented immigrants as “NYDs,” or “Not Yet Democrats.” As one member expressed to me “this is still our country. It’s up to us to make sure we don’t lose it.” Another member shared similar sentiments. “If they get some of these amnesty bills through, what’s gonna happen is that they’re gonna have a lot of illegal Mexicans that are gonna be able to vote and if they vote we just kiss the whole place goodbye. We’ll all move to Costa Rica or someplace, because if they do that there’s



nothing we can do about it.” Fear of “losing their country” was indelibly linked to losing the ballot box.

The election of Barack Obama further solidified in the minds of many MCC members that America was under attack from within. Howard Hutchins, a retired technology writer, believed that the issue of undocumented immigration reflected a country in slow decline. National pride, Howard believed, was not only on the decline, but it was viewed negatively, thanks largely to civil rights organizations. Howard wished for a return to a time long since passed. According to Howard, since the 1930s politicians and social justice advocates had been transforming the very structure of government. Under the current administration that process had been so accelerated that we are under threat of losing institutions that set America apart from other nation-states. What Howard was advocating was a return to a time when America stood for a particular set of values that included a particular state structure and a defined relationship between the government and private individuals.

The borders issue is not an isolated issue. Well, if we were the country today that we were in 1945 or 1941 this wouldn't have happened. The people would not have stood for it. We would not have had the ethnic pressure groups that we've allowed to grow up in our midst. The ACLU wasn't as powerful then as it is now. We wouldn't have had as many dumbed down generations of kids as we have now. We wouldn't have generations of kids bred to think that it's corny to salute the flag and corny to be patriotic and that nationalism is passé and it's better to think of ourselves as world citizens, and kids who've been trained to believe that there's nothing wrong with socialism, and that the government is here to do stuff for you. We weren't like that when I was a kid. God knows FDR had done all he could to create that mentality and he and his successors including the current administration have moved that ball forward. You know making us into a Euro-socialist state—a Euro-socialist *secular* state. It wouldn't have happened then. It is now. We are like an organism whose autoimmune system has been crippled or maybe destroyed. We no longer have the will to resist. We don't know what we stand for. Who we are. What our history is. We don't know the constitution. We are taught about, you know, feminists and uh, civil rights leaders, but we don't

know about the founders [of the Constitution]. We don't know the principals upon which liberty and individual responsibility are based. That is shameful. Shameful! Dangerous. Treasonous! If you don't know who you are, you don't know where you came from, you can be made to believe anything. And we are. You look at the crap we buy on mainstream media. One lie is superseded by another and we just nod our head and go on.

Howard's voice got stronger his speech more impassioned as he spoke and as he turned from lamenting the cause of the destruction of his nation to accusations of treason.

For Howard, understanding the significance of the border within the context of a long history of national threats set him and his compatriots, in his opinion, outside the mainstream in some way. Whereas the public at-large was being duped, he and his fellow Minutemen could see the dangerous reality. Though their specialized knowledge set them apart from others, the members of the MCC viewed themselves simply as a collection of "ordinary people" who were doing what the government had failed or refused to do. This was how Howard viewed his fellow Minutemen.

These people were all just people just like me. They were ordinary citizens who were concerned that we were losing our country, losing our sovereignty, were becoming Balkanized. [They believed] that the policies of porous borders was not an accident. [It] was not incompetence—although it has been some of that. It was a deliberate policy, a deliberate but unspoken policy.

Howard's comments about the "deliberate policy" of "porous borders" reflected the way that MCC members blamed the government for failing to secure the border and thus stopping the dramatic changes that they observed taking place in communities across the country. They accused the government, with the help of the "mainstream media," of deliberately fostering such changes.

Howard continued.

I knew that we were not getting the truth from the government. At that time [that I decided to join] it was George Bush. And um so I wanted to do it because I

thought it would have a) some practical effect—that is to you know (that) it might in fact slow ‘em down a little bit. But more than that I thought that we might register—put the thing on the public’s national radar. [The] mainstream media ignored it, [and] refused to talk about . . . the border invasion [and] illegal immigration and the government’s deliberate failure. [They] refused to address it. [You] couldn’t even get Fox News to talk about it [or] so-called right wing radio hosts.

By joining the MCC, members like Howard Hutchins not only hoped to slow down immigration, but also slow down the government’s efforts to “open” the borders, grant amnesty, or commit to other policies that would accelerate changes to American life.

The key, according to Howard, was that the government, “illegal” immigrants, Latino advocacy groups, and civil rights groups like the ACLU, were conspiring to destroy the nation. These groups had become so successful in their efforts that the United States no longer recognized itself as a nation.

The heart of it, the core of it, has got to be a nation that believes it is a nation and deserves to be a nation and wants to keep on being a nation—a nation that believes in its values—a nation that is restored. We can win this battle. Maybe we have for the time being won this particular skirmish, but we have not won the battle. And the Minutemen are only a small part of that. The other things that you see going on, the Tea Parties, We the People, all of the patriotic, in some cases, religious-based organizations and efforts that are being spontaneously developed across the country. But its very iffy as to whether it’s going to work or not. Do we just want to keep being fed our entitlements, our Turkish delights?

Howard saw his participation in the minuteman movement as a defense of the nation. As the effort to destroy the nation was broadly based, so also must be the response to defend it. It is important to recognize that for Howard, the nation is not the government. Implicit in his commentary is the belief that the government’s role should be to defend the nation from external and internal threat, but the government had failed in its duty. It was that reason that he joined the Minutemen and that they were needed and would always be needed.

I think we will always need [the Minutemen] because there are always gonna be external threats. If not the Mexicans, if not Latin Americans, it'll be Chinese. If not them, it'll be Muslims. And if not Mestizos looking for a job it'll be jihadists. I see defending the homeland as a permanent endeavor. I don't think that's ever gonna stop. And I think it's healthy too for citizens to do it. It's healthy for citizens to be involved at all levels of our government. We have treated our government as something that we can leave on autopilot. I think if we're gonna survive, that kind of hedonism and self-indulgence has got to go. And I think as a practical matter, whatever we do, we have lost our ass to the banks, to the financial interests, to corporate interests, to multi-national corporations. If we survive at all as a sovereign entity its' gonna be a lot closer to the Third World than any of us ever, ever imagined. I feel sorry for my kids and my grandkids. They're not gonna have the life I've had.

MCC members felt that they had lost the ability to stop cultural change and effect political change. They could no longer effect change through the ballot box because politicians served “special interests” and “big business.” Stopping undocumented immigration was important to the members of the MCC because they viewed it as a necessary step in regaining control over local and national politics. MCC members saw the impact of cultural change and tied it directly to their feelings of disempowerment. Defending the nation was also a deliberate strategy articulated by the members of the MCC of defending their own political clout. Joining the MCC gave members an opportunity to address their personal feelings of disempowerment by joining a group that was dedicated to protecting and expanding their rights and the rights of other “patriotic Americans.”

The reasons that MCC members gave for deciding to join the Minutemen identified a number of connected problems that impacted members personally and that they saw affecting the people and communities around them. These they defined as a threat to the American “nation” that they defined as primarily (and exclusively) white and Christian. They saw their purpose as a defense of the nation. Defending the border was

both a publicity stunt aimed at raising awareness and pressuring a government that refused and/or failed to protect the nation, and a practical effort aimed at stopping migrants from clandestinely crossing the border.

Taken together, these narratives illustrate how MCC members viewed a world, a nation, spinning out of control. This feeling derived in part from their feelings of powerlessness or victimization. For Russell, this loss of control crystallized in part when he was denied access to health care because of what appeared to be a hospital that was overburdened by “illegals.” For Carl Braun, it was the disorienting journey through a polyglot dystopia that resulted in feeling out of control. For Howard Hutchins the changing relationship between citizen and government, spurred in large part by undocumented immigration and the liberal organizations such as the ACLU and Latino advocacy groups that defended immigrants, further signified a nation that was under threat of destruction from within. And for Darren, the simple inability to communicate signified an appalling disruption to the mundane.

MCC members relied on racialized codes of difference to construct this narrative of an out of control world. They did so by tying racial differences to cultural ones, and by tying narratives of threat and danger to codes of foreignness. MCC members insisted that non-white immigrants posed a threat to the nation because they were poor, depended on (and demanded) government support at the expense of American citizens, and were more prone to criminal behavior, including terrorism. In contrast, MCC members defined American citizens as primarily white, Christian, conservative, law abiding, and patriotic.

The decision to join the MCC was guided in part by a belief in a shared identity, as well as a shared sense of disempowerment and victimization. MCC members

described the way that they felt disempowered and victimized by a collection of individuals, groups and institutions. MCC members described how they, their family, and other white Americans were losing jobs, were victims of crimes and the threat of crime, were becoming addicted to drugs imported from Mexico and Latin America, and were increasingly unable to do anything about it. In contrast, they identified immigrants and the children of immigrants as recipients of unwarranted and unfair government support and political clout. From the perspective of the MCC and its members, immigrant and minority groups were granted unfair access to the rights and protections of the U.S. government at the expense of white Americans.

As with other anti-immigrant groups, the Minutemen were engaged in a racialized discourse that created boundaries between categories of persons. Like the activists described in Jacobson's work, the Minutemen were engaged in reconfiguring racial discourse in ways that combined race neutral and racial realist ideologies. And like other immigration opponents, MCC members emphasized the failure of the government to protect the rights of U.S. citizens. However, unlike other past and contemporary anti-immigration activists, the Minutemen did not seek specific legislative remedies, nor did they emerge as a result of a directed campaign in support of or opposed to particular state or federal legislation.

Why did the Minutemen focus their efforts on border patrols? How did their decision to join the MCC provide members with opportunities to feel less victimized, to feel more in control of changing economic and political conditions, and to counter feelings of powerlessness?

## CHAPTER 4

### THE BORDER

On a Saturday morning in April 2008, along with a group of seven Minuteman volunteers, I departed Camp Vigilance for a daytime operation along the border. The operation was to take place on BLM land, public land where the carrying of arms is permitted. We started out from Camp Vigilance after nine A.M. Four vehicles left the property. I was riding with a Minuteman named Darren, who is from New England. Ahead of us two trucks carrying two men apiece, and a third truck driven by the leader of the operation, Ed Asbury, drove ahead of us. After we exited the main gate of the camp, Ed's voice rang out on the radio calling for a radio check. Darren replied that he heard Ed "loud and clear" as did one of the other teams. The third team did not reply. After repeatedly trying to contact the third team on the radio, Ed stopped the caravan, got out of his vehicle, and walked up to the truck carrying the team that had failed to check in. Likely they had forgotten to turn on their radio or had the volume turned down, something that happened often. After returning to his truck Ed once again called for a radio check. Unfortunately, this time he used the wrong call sign. We were all using the same call sign, "Patriot," with each team having a different letter designation, A, B, etc. Problem was that some of the volunteers had served in the military and in different branches at a time when they used a different phonetic alphabet. So when Ed identified himself as Patriot Baker calling Patriot Alpha (he should have

been Alpha) not only did he use the wrong letter, he used the wrong phonetic spelling (Baker instead of Bravo) which meant that he was calling for someone that did not exist. Confused, no one answered. After a short delay, Darryl called and reminded Ed that he was Alpha and the Bravo team realized that he was calling them, and we were able to get on our way assured that our radios, if not our radio protocol, were at least working.

We turned onto a local highway and headed east. As the highway wound its way we reached a dirt road marked by a single oak tree. The lead vehicle stopped under the tree with the rest of us pulling in behind him. Minutemen piled out of the vehicles and proceeded to load their weapons. Unarmed, I was the only one who remained in the vehicle. After they were finished loading and securing their guns we continued on.

Dust hung in the air as the road turned east and pressed between a series of rocky hills to the south and an elevated plateau to the north. We came upon a small alcove carved into the wall of rock and parked the vehicles there. Two members stayed behind to relay radio traffic back to Camp Vigilance and to keep an eye on the vehicles. The rest of us followed a trail that headed south towards the border.

The trail gently rose as it traversed a large gap between two hills. Popular images of the border often evoke feelings of chaos, disorder, rampant lawlessness, danger, and threat. But there is a palpable serenity present at this stretch of the border. Glorious vistas of bare rock stained red by past fire prevention efforts give way to desert chaparral and pasture lands. Quartz deposits periodically erupt from the ground vibrantly white. In the spring, wildflowers paint the hills in hues of gold and purple. As we trekked towards our operation site, the sounds of birdsong, the winds against the rock and the sand, and dead Manzanita branches scraping together on the desert floor filled the air, instead of the



often ubiquitous sounds of violence and danger produced by Border Patrol helicopters and diesel trucks.

As we inched our way closer to the border evidence of cross border traffic became ever present. Greater quantities of empty water bottles, weathered and torn backpacks, and “booties,” or scraps of wool blanket that migrants tie to their feet with wire to mask their footsteps, periodically littered the ground as we neared the border.

The trail turned slightly east and the hill to our right abruptly ended. Below us, and a few hundred feet in the distance, the green corrugated metal fence that marked the border came into view. This type of fence is made up of surplus landing mats that were used by the U.S. military during the Vietnam War. Trees and the contours of the hills obscured all but a small section of the border fence from view. Beyond the fence pasture land extended as far as the eye could see. The border fence and the dirt road that ran alongside it disrupted what would have otherwise been a beautiful view. As we stared at the fence and beyond one of my Minuteman companions opined, this really is beautiful country. Too bad it belongs to Mexico, another volunteer quipped.

I was not sure if he meant the land on the other side of the fence, or if he was referring sarcastically to both sides of the border. Before I could ask he turned and started moving on.

Two Minutemen decided to set up there at the spot overlooking the fence. Tired and unable to continue on the hike, they hunkered down in the rocks and the bushes and began their vigil. I, along with Darren and Ed carried on as the trail continued east over the hill. We continued through a small defile in the rock that quickly obscured our view of the border and our companions. What was at first a well-trod path gave way to rocks,

trees, and fissures creating many a dead end and forcing us to improvise a way east past and over the hill that obscured our view of the border. I quickly began to sweat as the trail became more difficult to traverse and as the day warmed.

We said little, instead concentrating on our path as we continued to look for a good place to observe the border. Heavy, dry winds, and the arid environment had shaped the rocks into alien shapes—some lone sentinels that interrupted our path, others stacked precariously atop one another. The rocks were all stained a reddish-pink color due to the flame retardant dropped on them from aircraft in recent years.

After what seemed like an hour hike we once again came upon what my companions identified as the border. Unlike the green corrugated steel fence that we had encountered at the start of our hike, in front of us stood a pair of barbed wire fences strung along a small valley formed by a break in the rocks. The break in the rocks was less than one hundred feet wide. The fences ran parallel to each other. The southernmost fence stood no more than ten yards beyond the northern fence. Both fences consisted of multiple strands of heavily rusted barbed wire running parallel to the ground. Between the strands that made up the northernmost fence, someone had recently strung more barbed wire perpendicular to the old strands, presumably to prevent anyone from climbing through. Ed told Darren and me that MCC volunteers were the ones that had augmented the old fence with the new materials. He said that one of the fences marked the border, and the other marked the boundary of a private ranch though he wasn't sure which one was the border and which one the property boundary.

We took a short break. We each pulled out our binoculars and gazed out onto the valley to our south. The valley below was empty of everything except birds and only birdsong broke the silence. We continued on.

Eventually we came to the peak of the hill. A cluster of caves formed by the large rocks dotted the top of the hill. These caves were little more than shallow shelters beaten out of the rocks or formed by two or three boulders tossed against one another. Within these caves we found what appeared to be years of rubbish left behind by migrants as they prepared to carry on with their journeys. Water bottles, tin cans, candy wrappers, to-go containers and the occasional backpack littered the floors of the caves. Where the passage of time had not worn their surfaces bare, non-U.S. brands adorned their labels. In one such cave a tiny alcove was clear of all garbage except for a small makeshift shrine. At the heart of the shrine was a small wooden cross made of two four-by-two inch pieces of wood resting on the ground behind a lone candle set in a soup can. The candle had seen little use; it was either new, or the cave had long since sheltered travelers on their way north.

After taking a few photographs we began climbing back down the eastern side of the hill when we came upon another small valley marked by a barbed wire fence similar to the one that we had seen at the start of our trek. Our hike had initially taken us north so we were surprised to find ourselves back near the fence. However, we were more surprised to find a second barbed wire fence and that to the north of us. Unsure of which fence it was, I asked Derrick if these were the same fences that we saw before. Derrick's eyes widened as he exclaimed "Wait. Are we in Mexico? We gotta go back!"

We were reminded in that moment that the border is often invisible, marked neither by fence, road, monument, nor any other device. Even when a barbed wire fence marks its approximate location, without a sign, a guard, a port of entry, or a monument, the border often remains hidden in plain sight. Not only is the border often poorly marked, it is often situated miles from any highway, and hidden from view by meandering dirt roads, canyons, and mountains. Most people in the United States and Mexico, even those who live near it, go their whole lives without ever seeing the border.

I later learned that we were not, in fact, in Mexico. On the contrary, the fences that we observed were actually built by the Minutemen. Nevertheless, our experience demonstrated just how easy it is to cross the border whether you intended to or not. As I discovered in the innumerable times that my Minuteman guides and I got lost on our way to the border, it can be surprisingly difficult to find the border. And sometimes the border finds you.

Our experience at the border was not unique. After hearing about our encounter with what we thought was the Mexican side of the border, another Minuteman said that they too had unexpectedly stumbled upon the border. He had been out with another member who wanted to test out his new GPS device. As they tried to use the GPS to find the border, a female Border Patrol agent walked up to them and asked them what they were doing. They explained that they were trying to use the GPS to identify the border.

“You’re standing on it,” she replied. Another step in the wrong direction and they would have been in Mexico.

Another volunteer was driving along a back road near the border in California’s Imperial County. As they followed the road their GPS showed that they were steadily

heading southeast toward the border. Expecting the road to eventually turn back north, they were alarmed when according to their GPS device they suddenly found themselves crossing into Mexico.

For the Minutemen the lack of a continuous 2,000-mile fence that extended from the Pacific to the Gulf of Mexico was a glaring example of the U.S. government's refusal to take border security serious. If it was that easy for a Minuteman to accidentally slip into Mexico, imagine how easy it must be for someone who wants to sneak into the U.S.

These events further illustrated the artificiality of the border. Without a fence, monument, or other boundary marker, how do we know the border is there at all? Without such signs it becomes difficult not only to identify the physical dimensions of the border, but also its symbolic contours. In this chapter I discuss the ways that the Minutemen made sense of the border and how through their actions they crafted a collective sense of belonging that tied anti-immigrant activism to constructions of national identity. I discuss how the Minutemen altered the physical space of the border by augmenting existing fencing and creating new fences where none before existed. Building fences was but one way that the Minutemen established a collective sense of control over a disordered borderland. The Minutemen projected the disorders that they encountered at home onto the space of the border. In response, not only did Minuteman volunteers patrol the border in search of clandestine border crossers, but they also sought to construct a safe space at the border.

Unlike other anti-immigration groups, the Minutemen sought to duplicate official efforts to regulate and control cross border flows. In so doing, the Minutemen provided its members with the opportunity to see themselves not simply as victims but as agents of

change. In so doing, MCC members constructed and appropriated an agentive subjectivity that emphasized the duties and requirements of citizenship. Citizenship became a duty-bound expression of patriotism and national fidelity. As active agents of change, MCC members sought to secure the rights and privileges of citizenship by physically stopping non-white immigrants from crossing into the United States.

### Making the Border Visible

In October 2006, a few dozen MCC volunteers drove to a border site in the O'Neil valley just south of Camp Vigilance. There they attached eight by twelve inch flags to the posts of a fence along the border. The flags were the kind that one might see at a Memorial Day parade or a Fourth of July celebration. Here dual steel beams attached to vertical poles set into the ground every eight to ten feet formed the border fence. MCC volunteers affixed small notes to the flags. Some members attached messages to loved ones who had died, or offered words to fallen U.S. soldiers. Others placed nationalistic messages like "Don't tread on me," or "Secure our borders," while others attached defiant messages directed at migrants instructing them that they were not welcome or that they should go "home."

This wasn't the first time that the MCC had staged an event that involved the physical representations of the border. A few months earlier, in May, the MCC hosted a "Come Build the Fence" event where over one hundred volunteers worked together to build a barbed wire fence along an unmarked stretch of Mexico-U.S. border. A contingent of local and national news media representatives documented the event including camera crews from CNN and Fox News. The Minuteman volunteers

constructed two fences set sixty feet apart. The fences consisted of two to three horizontal strands of barbed wire that MCC volunteers attached to green and white vertical poles that they sank into the ground. The MCC's fences began where the official fence ended and extended over uneven, rocky lands until it reached another stretch of already built fencing. In some areas they attached square patterned wire fencing to the barbed wire to create a more effective barrier. In other areas they interspersed vertical strands of barbed wire between the horizontal strands to make it impossible for anyone to slip through the fence. I learned that it was this fence that my Minuteman companions and I had encountered during our hike.

Though its ability to act as an effective barrier against clandestine border crossing was limited—a set of bolt cutters would easily destroy the fence—by building the fence, the Minutemen were trying to send a clear message to the media, government, and migrants alike.

Barbed wire fences serve a utilitarian and a symbolic purpose. On ranches, for example, they both mark the boundaries of a property and prevent cattle from escaping. In prisons they prevent and discourage inmates from escaping by climbing the fence, they reinforce inmates' status as prisoners, and they extend the physical reach and power of those who guard the prison. Around private property and at military installations barbed wire fences protect the people, documents, and possessions of those who reside and work within from those outside the fence's bounds, and like the prison fence, say something about who legitimately belongs on either side of the fence. Finally, on battlefields, barbed wire fences serve as barriers that slow or funnel opposing forces making them easier to kill en masse, and warn civilian and soldier alike that war is being waged here.

The purpose of the MCC's fence was also both utilitarian and symbolic. The MCC fence extended an already existing barrier and added teeth to it. It sought to protect those whom were legitimately inside its bounds—"Americans"—from those who were outside—"illegal immigrants," "terrorists," and "criminals"—and defined the border primarily as a barrier. The fence further transformed what was an invisible boundary into a clearly identifiable and dangerous barrier. The MCC fence made the border visible not just to those who witness it as they attempt to cross, but also to the public, media, and government officials

Both events were carefully crafted spectacles that sent the message that if the government was not willing to protect the border, the Minutemen would. The Come Build the Fence event took place just days before the national immigration rights protests that took place in cities across the country. In the post-event report, the MCC described the event as a group of "Ordinary Americans, citizens, taxpayers, all fed up with the government's refusal to secure the border" gathering together to "[do] the job that the American government"(Minuteman Civil Defense Corps 2006) would not do. In the words of one MCC member, the fence was designed to "shame" the government into building its own fence.

Constructing a border fence was not solely a way of making the border and the issue of immigration more visible, however. It augmented the border. It added on to the border both physically and symbolically. Constructing a barbed wire fence in particular, sought to lay claim to a contested territory.



### The Spectacle of Border Security

For most MCC volunteers the fence *is* the border. That is, for the members of the MCC, the border's primary symbolic and practical function should be that as a barrier. "What does a secure border look like?" one member asked. "There's a fence. There's enforcement to get in. There's none of this open—you can do trade and commerce without just opening it up."

Building a fence and policing the border figured prominently in members' descriptions of the MCC's purpose and organizational goals. One member explained that the Minutemen would continue to muster until the government stopped amnesty "and closed that fence off." Another explained that the Minutemen would accomplish their mission when clandestine border crossing stopped along all of the United States' borders. In making this declaration, he used language that referenced to the border in ways that blurred the racial and geographic contours of national boundaries.

I mean no body passing, no human passing through either border. . . . There are three borders as we see it: brown border, U.S. with Mexico; green border, U.S. with Canada; blue border, U.S. with both oceans. A complete shutdown of all of these three borders only allowing those to pass into this country that . . . have submitted applications, waited their turn in line and have been granted permission to come onto these shores. That is a complete shut down of the border.

Another member explained that, "The mission for the Minutemen is [to] secure national borders. Immigration laws enforced honestly and vigorously with . . . organized cooperation. And for that to happen, I mean, the fence is an important tactic. Border watchers like us are an important tactic. A beefed up Border Patrol with good technology that's an important tactic."

To a person, MCC members expressed serious doubts about whether the MCC would ever accomplish its mission.

It can never be finished because of the government. The government doesn't want it to be finished. They don't want to close the border and that's all there is to it. Closing the borders. The borders. Any place that we can be infiltrated not in a, gee they're all behind me. But it's all common sense things. You have a neighboring country that is willing to work with you to do the same thing you are which we don't have in the south. The north we do. And you know our ports and our overseas bases. I consider them all part of one. Our container ships have to be, it's a total security thing. It's what homeland security is supposed to be doing.

Though the MCC focused primarily on conducting border watch operations in southern California, MCC members discussed the need for law enforcement efforts at both northern and southern borders, at ports, along the oceans, and transnational transportation.

For the MCC, an unmanned, unwatched, unpatrolled, and unfenced border is an “open” border, tantamount to an open invitation to anyone who wishes to cross into the U.S. MCC members acknowledged that clandestine border crossers were going to continue to try to cross the border whether the Minutemen were there or not. “They’re gonna try. As long as you make it hard because you know they move somewhere else. You wanna do whatever you can to discourage it. What else—the only other alternative is to say, ‘come on in.’ That’s the only alternative. We say ‘go home.’”

An open border leaves the United States vulnerable to those social ills that MCC members described in the previous chapter. The “open” border further revealed for the Minutemen, a refusal or inability of the government to “do its job” and defend the nation against foreign threats.

Not only were the Minutemen duplicating the physical tactics that state law enforcement agencies initiated, they were also drawing on decades of immigration-regulation-as-border-security efforts that projected the image of the border as a barrier, while simultaneously ensuring that it continued to function as an economic bridge. Through enhanced enforcement activities at the border, the state has demonstrated a remarkable ability to shape the significance of the border and illicit cross border flows in the public imagination. In the years immediately preceding the institution of Operations Hold the Line and Gatekeeper, and in the lead up to legislative efforts such as California's Proposition 187, a ballot initiative that sought to restrict undocumented immigrants' access to public services such as health care and education, those policy makers who supported the anti-immigrant measure effectively projected the image of the border as a fundamentally out of control space and "border security" as a natural state response (Andreas 2001:7). Peter Andreas argues that "Border control efforts are not only *actions* (a means to a state instrumental end) but also *gestures* that communicate meaning" (2001:30; emphasis in original). Despite the inability of federal law enforcement agencies to effectively deter unauthorized entry, border security efforts instead represent a powerful "ceremonial practice," (Andreas 2001:30) that projects the image of the border as a nevertheless controllable location and the image of the state as capable of carrying out effective enforcement measures.

After the institution of Operation Gatekeeper, the news media remarked on the changes that the new border policing strategy had wrought. The news media credited "the vaunted clampdown" with "slash[ing] the number of people arrested for unlawful entry in San Diego to levels not seen since Richard Nixon was president" (Nevins 2002:3). What

before was a chaotic thoroughfare marked by “banzai runs” of hundreds of migrants dashing across freeways was now calm and peaceful. The real “success” of the current border security strategy, then, is its ability to craft an image that makes the border seem controllable and more controlled regardless of the state’s ability to actually control illicit cross border flows.

In other words, the immigration panics that have garnered high levels of public attention since the 1970s, did not simply propel state intervention at the border, rather the state has been instrumental in crafting the image of the “illegal” “through the construction of the boundary and the expansion” of border security efforts (Nevins 2002:9). By crafting an image of the border that equates illegality with immigration and border crossing, the state has justified and normalized the expansion of border policing efforts.

In the process, the boundaries of the United States and their accompanying social practices have come to seem increasingly normal, ‘natural,’ and beyond politics. . . . This has had the effect of greatly limiting the parameters of debate within the United States about matters concerning boundary and immigration enforcement. At the same time, the U.S.-Mexico divide is today more part of Americans’ geographical imagination than it has ever been...The accompanying increased emphasis on boundary enforcement and immigration-related illegality is an outgrowth of growing state power vis-à-vis the U.S.-Mexico divide and high levels of public acceptance of this power. (Nevins 2002:11)

Border policing efforts have become central in equating border policing efforts with immigration regulation and undocumented immigration with the image of the out of control border.

Accordingly, the border has become a kind of political stage where border policing efforts form part of a public message that seeks to shape public opinion in ways that justify the intensification of border policing efforts (Andreas 2001). Not only has the

state effectively shaped the public's perception of immigration and the border, but the intensification of border policing efforts has "helped to create new ways of seeing among" the public (Nevins 2002:9). Border policing is thus, "not simply a policy instrument for deterring illegal crossings but a symbolic representation of state authority; it communicated the state's commitment to marking and maintaining the borderline" (Andreas 2001:8) as an end in itself. In sum, the state has been integral in shaping the significance of the border. By crafting the image of the out of control, yet controllable, border, the state has criminalized undocumented immigration in ways that concretize or "harden" the border both literally (through the erection of physical boundaries such as fencing and the deployment of material resources such as surveillance vehicles and Border Patrol personnel) and figuratively (through promoting the logic of the boundary as a contested site that must be won).

Similarly, the MCC was engaged in a symbolic effort that projected the image of the border as an out of control space. Though they participated in efforts that drew them into close contact with the vast machinery of state border security efforts, the MCC engaged in political theater that highlighted what they saw as the failures of the state to secure the borders (a point that I address in greater detail in the following chapter). They crafted an image of the border and the borderlands as a dangerous and out of control space. In the following section I describe how the Minutemen described the dangers of the border and surrounding borderlands.

### The Dangers of the Borderlands

The Minuteman Corps of California have an impeccable safety record. No migrant has been injured, assaulted, or physically harmed by the MCC. Similarly, the most significant injury experienced by a member of the MCC was when a Border Patrol Auxiliary volunteer fell off of an ATV. The accident resulted in him losing the tip of a finger.

Nevertheless, the Minutemen often relate stories of the dangers of the border. While the vast majority of Minuteman activity, like my hike in April 2008 is relatively uneventful, narratives of danger and the dangers of the border are often shared among members in camp. MCC volunteers often explained that local residents were frequently the victims of violence and property damage perpetrated by clandestine border crossers.

It's overwhelming for [local residents]. Destroying property. [Immigrants] commit crimes. Despite what ABC would want you to think, they commit crimes. [They] even [make it hard for] somebody to get water [because] they'll tear up water systems. People who have livestock they have to keep putting thousands of dollars into it. They'll break into houses to get food you know and some will rob you. Something wrong in a country that's like the U.S. where a resident has to be armed to walk out their front door. A couple can't take a vacation together. Something's wrong. And we give them that little break and they appreciate it.

Clandestine border crossers harmed animals and livestock, which angered some MCC members.

One man he was talkin' about his dog had over 200 stitches from multiple knifings. Because every time it barked because they were breaking into his house they'd slash him. They didn't kill him. And then maybe the next time they'd come through somebody'd slash him. . . . They also slash somebody else's horse and somebody else's donkey. Now they don't make any noise. So they're a bunch of, as far as I'm concerned . . . hater bastards. I don't care who they are, but if they're pulling that crap. And that's what's coming into this country. . . . Anyways, so I wanna seem 'em all shot. I could care less, but when somebody pulls crap like that I have no interest in them at all. Their body I don't even wanna put a flower on 'em.

According to MCC members, not only had clandestine border crossers destroyed property and harmed pets and livestock, but they also harmed local residents. “This one woman, one time I guess she went out to the store . . . she left, she came back and caught them in her house. And I guess using the phone, stealing stuff, tearing into things and everything. So they cut her throat. Killed her.”

The dangers of the borderlands near Camp Vigilance were such that, according to MCC volunteers, residents had to be armed just to leave their homes.

Now a lot of people I’ve talked to they will not go out of their house into their yards without a gun on ‘em. And that’s into a highly fenced yard and they got dogs that are barking. I wouldn’t live down here. That’s why when I’m staying here more I want to get another small dog that makes noise. Tell everybody they bark I bite.

Members used these stories of danger at and near the border to justify their own decision to carry guns.

My wife and I have talked about this . . . that, hey though I’m not in a uniform . . . if it comes down to me trying to physically prevent a drug smuggler from walking into the United States . . . he’s probably gonna remove the threat, is my thought. So I’m in a dangerous environment and that’s why I do carry a sidearm and it is to protect myself and my buddies, my fellow Minuteman members.

MCC members expressed that the danger was increasing. They pointed to media reports about drug violence in Mexico. Some subscribed to the M3 Report, a daily report of drug related violence in Mexico that is produced by the National Association of Former Border Patrol Officers which provides graphic accounts of some of the most violent results of the Mexican drug war, and referenced it when they described the dangers of the border. The escalation of the drug war south of the border had resulted in increased danger when out on ops. “The cartels are in control,” said one volunteer. “You’re not talking about lettuce pickers or a couple of men in a group coming over. You’re talking

cartels with the police and military escorting them to the border with their drug loads.

[You're] talking about people getting shot."

According to one member, the MCC's mission was initially more like a publicity stunt. But when they saw the actual dangers of "illegal" immigration at the border their mission shifted.

I think initially it was, it still is to a big degree, initially it was symbolic and to bring attention to what was going on down here. And that was achieved. Of course when people started seeing illegals popping up in their backyard and taking their jobs they became a little more aware also. But it's escalated and the situation has deteriorated so much the last few years. I've watched it. . . . It's become more defensive then it used to be. They shoot at you now, the cartels. There's rampant crime. Kidnappings. You've got Phoenix now, kidnapping capital of the U.S., second in the world next to Mexico City. What does that say? You got banditos roaming.

One member claimed to have been chased by a cartel member.

I personally have been chased down here on 94 by a bandito who was out to harm me, you know. And this is a couple of years ago. Followed me and chased me around curves. With 25 miles an hour posted I was going 65 to get away from them. I got away from 'em 'cause I pulled right in front of a Highway Patrol. That's how I got away.

The dangers of the border presented themselves to some members when they were out on ops. David West, an MCC member who is both a local chapter leader and a member of BPAUX, recounted his experience with the potential dangers of the border. The site upon which this operation took place is situated on a high hill that bisects the Mexico-U.S. border. No fence marks the border on the top of the hill. Instead a seven-foot obelisk stands as the only reference to the location of the border.

Myself and one other member were on the west side watching the [government road] toward Tecate at about 11pm, approaching midnight. And so it was a full moon but with a lot of high cloud cover, a lot of fast winds, so when the moon was full and fully exposed it was very bright. You could almost read out. When the clouds covered the moon for a brief period of time it was pitch black. You couldn't see more than let's say five feet in front of your face. . . . It was quite



cold so we were in full winter gear. I mean it was very chilly up there. And I noticed a human figure, a black figure, come over the south side of [the hill] still in Mexico. And then I noticed three others—so a total of four human bodies carrying backpacks. They were all black but I thought it was due to the shadows. The man in front, whom I will refer to as the scout, sensed our presence, or I thought perhaps saw us, or thought he may have seen us. . . . So at this point my buddy is leaning up against a rock trying to make himself as, not invisible, but uh blended into the background as possible. I've got a rock in front of me about the size of a freezer chest. So at first I'm standing behind this thing and it's up to [just] below my waist. And this guy I thought was gonna go past us and then over this fence into the United States and then come back and tell his buddies, you know, that the coast is clear and, you know, climb through. We're trying to whisper into our radios to let our buddies on the east side know that we've got company up here.

David's description of the scout as a "black figure" and his companions who were "all black" gives them a shadowy, sinister visage. Referencing their backpacks, David further identifies them with drug smuggling. When MCC members observed Mexican military, or individuals that they describe as *cartelistas* they typically referred to them as "men in black pajamas." David is thus making the claim that these individuals are attempting to cross the border for reasons other than employment; or to reference Carl Braun, these weren't a bunch of "strawberry pickers."

During the Vietnam War the Vietcong were often referred to as "the men in black pajamas." For many of the members of the MCC, having grown up during the Vietnam era, and with some having participated in the Vietnam War, referring to clandestine border crossers as men in black pajamas would have added significance. It blended the distinction between regular Mexican military, drug and people smugglers, and foreign police forces in ways that heightened feelings of unease and distrust. Patrolling the border becomes more than simply enforcing the law, but is a necessary security effort to protect against a military threat.

When the scout deviated from his path and turned towards David and his companion, an already tense situation turned potentially violent.

And so this scout took a turn into us and at this point I crouched behind this rock the size of a freezer chest and at this point I'm looking back at my buddy his hand is on his sidearm. He is carrying a revolver by the way. I'm carrying a semi-automatic weapon. But at this night I happen to have it on a shoulder holster and I'm fully wrapped up in a ski coat, a ski parka. And so I'm trying to unzip my coat to just gain access. At this point I see this scout as having a long rifle on his shoulder as well as a side arm. And fortunately at this point each time that he would look over toward our side it was pitch black. And each time the moon came out again he's looking in another direction. So we were able to watch this guy very closely you know from a hundred feet to fifty to thirty to twenty-five. And I'm thinking to myself at what point is enough, enough. And at what point do we introduce ourselves as the nation's liaison and welcome them in for a cup of tea.

David does not make reference to where he and this "scout" are in relation to the border, so we do not know at what point the "scout" actually crosses into the United States, if he ever does. Moreover David bases his decision to reveal himself to the "scout," not on the scout's proximity to the border, but on the relative "threat" that the "scout" poses to him. Indeed, at the start of his narrative, he was prepared to let the "scout" and his companions walk past him before radioing Camp Vigilance.

And finally when he came in contact with this rock in front of me within arm's reach—somewhere between three and five feet away from me—and it was pitch black at that point—as soon as he touched this rock, the clouds cleared, the moon shone and the three of us were standing there looking at each other. In the meantime I still see two of his buddies in the background shadows, but they're not looking toward us. At that point I'm still trying to get to my sidearm and I can't reach it. Since then I went home and immediately got on EBay and got a mid-thigh holster for my thigh for the side of my body. At that point I introduced myself. I said uh "Hello there are you lost can we help you find your way? Are you in need of emergency care? Are you cold? Are you hungry? How can we help?" You know. And he put his hand on his sidearm and he spoke Spanish. I don't speak but just a couple words of Spanish and I told him I don't speak Spanish but you know would he like me to contact the American Red Cross. His hand's on his sidearm. His eyes are shifting. He's looking at my buddy between me and him and me and him. And the next thing I know . . . I hear "click, click." And it's my buddy engaging his weapon—again he has a revolver. He pulled it

out of his holster. He pulled the hammer back, pointing the pistol at the sky. But I didn't know it at the time, and here I am between the two. And the immediate thought to me is this is not a good place to be, between the end of the gun and the target. And so I crouched down low and I'm continuing to talk to him and I said you know I don't speak Spanish but you know we have blankets, we have food and water would you like some help. And he started stepping back. And he's watching both of us. His hand is still on his sidearm and he traces his step back about 30 paces back he turns around and goes back to his buddies. I see him talking to the two figures that were exposed during that little uh interaction there, and the three of them at that point went down back into Mexico.

David describes his encounter with the "scout," after they are revealed to one another, in a way that emphasizes the performative aspects of MCC operations. From David's physical description of the "scout" and his description of the "scout's" actions, i.e., as a "black figure" with shifty eyes and his hand on his sidearm, we come to the conclusion that here is a man who is dangerous, not someone who is "lost" or in need of medical aid. It is also clear from David's actions, such as his attempt to locate his sidearm, and his MCC partner's actions, that they believed that they were under threat of violence. Whether the events took place the way that David describes them, we nevertheless get the impression that the Minutemen are participating in a humanitarian intervention despite enduring great risks to their own physical safety. David uncritically overlooks his own actions and those of his companion in creating a dangerous situation. He ignores the significance of his own attempts to locate his weapon, and the role it may have played in provoking the "scout." Perhaps the "scout" placed his hand on his gun because he saw David and his companion trying to find theirs. Instead, David's description of the "scout" and his companions justifies threatening them with violence. Indeed, David uses this experience to justify purchasing equipment that would make it easier to use his weapon to threaten or enact violence in the future.

Interestingly, David implicitly acknowledges the dangers posed by his Minuteman companion. David's fear of the "scout" harming him is overwhelmed by his fear of being between his partner's gun and its shadowy target. Although the incident that David describes is a rarity, it illustrates what kind of danger the Minutemen reference when explaining their decision to carry arms. Though the Minutemen are the ones seeking migrants or drug traffickers—the Minutemen are the hunters, the aggressors—David positions himself as the one under threat of violence. Even when the speaker reaches for his gun and his partner cocks his revolver, the inherent threat of the "drug runner" justifies their actions as defensive in nature.

It is important to reiterate that the Minutemen are not in the habit of taking their guns out of their holsters. In almost every instance, the Minutemen adhere to a strict policy that forbids the drawing of their weapons except in self-defense. However, the dangers of the border necessitated arming oneself. Members often related tales of new members who began as unarmed participants that went out and purchased a gun because of their experiences at the border. Tara, who typically participates in the most clandestine operations that require a tremendous amount of dexterity and stamina explained to me:

You have to be able to take care of each other. We wanna do everything safely...But (for) the people committed enough to put themselves in that danger because they believe in the reason why they're there in the first place it isn't just a social gathering. So you have to learn to shoot if you didn't know before. You have to learn to watch the other person's back. So it's ratcheted up to a different level. And be expected that there's a big possibility of being fired upon or rocked. A lot can happen out here.

I asked her what you do in a situation like that. She replied, "Well you retreat from danger if you can. If you can't you know you have to be prepared to defend yourself. But obviously the first act would be to retreat to safety."

David West and his companions did not retreat to safety. They stood firm and pulled their weapons on “the scout.” The effect was that the “scout” and his companions retreated back to Mexico and were reportedly arrested later. Not only did the Minutemen deter this group by threatening them with violence, but they also claimed credit for their eventual apprehension.

David’s narrative of danger is important because it supports the Minutemen’s construction of the border as an out of control place. It provides a firsthand account of the violent dangers of the out of control border. It provides powerful context for the differences that the Minutemen encounter in their communities away from the border. It also provides the same powerful context to supporters or potential supporters who hear the stories that Minutemen tell about the dangers of the border. Describing the dangers of the border further attracts members who are seeking excitement and the thrill of the hunt.

#### Border Patrols as Recreation

Border ops were typically uneventful, tedious affairs. Most operations in which I participated were usually spent huddled in vehicles or behind rocks as we sought shelter from the bitter wind. Some members liked to talk and did not concern themselves with being seen or heard by anyone including clandestine border crossers. Others observed in silence, hunkered down in the brush and hidden from view. Even with the aid of infrared scopes and thermal imaging cameras, with the exception of Border Patrol agents moving past us in their vehicles, we rarely caught sight of anything living on either side of the border let alone clandestine border crossers. While describing the border as a dangerous place was a way for members to justify arming themselves and to justify the need for

greater border security measures, it also revealed how, for some, placing oneself in danger could be thrilling, exciting, and fun. These members tended to seek the most active types of operations which were covert and took place outside, instead of in a vehicle or sitting in a chair at the border.

David agreed that most operations were less than diverting. “Most of it’s boredom. Most of it’s just sitting there night after night (with) nothing happening.” Even when the Minutemen observe someone or a group of people trying to cross the border, “you see off in the distance with the thermal scope, you see bodies and you call ‘em in,” often without knowing if they were apprehended or not. “Coming into such close contact with the “scout,” David described as “something I’ll remember the rest of my life.”

Seeking clarification, I asked why he would place himself in a situation that he described as dangerous.

Why go down there instead of sitting in my very comfortable home and do cyber watch, lets say? Um, part of it’s adrenaline. Part of it’s (an) adrenaline rush. I don’t want to come across as a you know a lawn chair cowboy that, you know, drinks cheap beer and, you know, straps on a weapon, a loaded weapon and goes to hunt illegal aliens. And often times that’s how we’re portrayed by our enemies in this cause. But for me it’s a package. . . . So we’ve got the educational aspect of it. We’ve got the boots on the ground getting involved, really where it’s happening. We’ve got my sense of patriotic and civic duty, wanting to give back in some capacity where I’m not a hindrance but I’m an asset; I’m a, you know, valued member contributing to a cause.

One member who left the MCC to work independently with other local Minuteman groups explained that her decision to leave had partly to do with the MCC’s inability to coordinate operations that would accommodate those who wanted a more exciting (and potentially dangerous) experience, and those who were either unable to participate in those types of operations or who wanted something less vigorous. She

blamed MCC leadership, in particular of caring more about money than ensuring that everyone got to participate to the best of their abilities.

And you get people that I think when you're placing people, they're gonna come down and they want to do something and that's admirable. But I think they have to be suited to that. There are some people that shouldn't be out on the rocks. They endanger everybody. And more needs to be done there as far as paying more attention to that then, 'OK we can't be bothered. 'Everybody's paid lets make sure of it.' And 'OK let's go out.' And you're trying as a leader out in the field you can be put in bad situation and you have to keep everybody safe. And some things aren't suitable then you try to keep it too safe then you lose a lot of people that have a different skill set.

For some members "safety" meant "boredom." These members would often express frustrations over what they saw as an organization that was too sedate. One such member, frustrated by his inability to recruit other members to participate in an operation, exclaimed, "This place is too luxurious. It's too much like a campground. Too many people are just sitting around. We need to get them out."

On the other hand, some members were attracted to operations that were less vigorous, that did not expose them to danger or risk. These members expressed that they never felt unsafe or threatened. It was not danger that attracted them to the Minutemen, but feeling like part of a community of like-minded individuals. And it was the promise of safety and camaraderie that motivated many members to join and kept them coming back to Camp Vigilance. Camp Vigilance provided members with a safe space in what they saw as an increasingly hostile environment in their home communities. Minuteman musters provided members with an opportunity to spend some much needed time with others who shared their ideals and beliefs. "There is some value in just being reassured that you still got the troops supporting you," Howard told me. "I mean, you know that we're not the last man standing. And so there is a certain amount of reassurance just to

get together. And frankly it is enjoyable to get together with these guys. We share the same values and it's just pleasant.”

Russell explained that after retiring he missed the camaraderie that being a police officer had once provided him.

I missed my relationships with other people that felt the same way as I did. When I stopped being a police officer I joined the FOP and cooked at their meals and stuff like that. I just liked to be around them because they thought the same way I did. Not all of them, no. ‘Cause police drive drunk. Police do things that are wrong, and I don’t condone that. But that was the one thing that I thought maybe I could get together with a bunch of guys. And I do, I enjoy that part of it. I really do.

Whether it was just “BSing” around the fire or out by the grotto behind the bunkhouse, Minuteman musters gave members an opportunity to let loose, to talk about what they wanted and in the way they wanted to without having to fear about being accused of being racist, or xenophobic, or confrontational. Members repeatedly described MCC musters to me as “therapy,” highlighting the way that Camp Vigilance provided them with a safe space to discuss those social issues that troubled them.

Even on operations, especially ones in which the Minutemen remained in their vehicles, just talking turned an otherwise tedious affair into a good time. Conversations meandered from contemporary politics such as primary races or the presidential election, to conversations about how disturbing it was when some of the members travelled to the Jim Crow south when they were young. One member who was a huge Doo Wop fan would often sing or whistle a few bars and ask his partners if they remembered the song.

Minuteman musters also provided members with an opportunity to share information about a variety of social and political issues. Minuteman leaders and members shared forwarded email messages about important immigration legislation or



protest events. At Camp Vigilance, during and in between operations, volunteers spent most of their time talking about politics, providing reading suggestions, or sharing information about guns, ammunition, home improvement, disaster preparedness, and other practical matters. Regardless of its original source or content, the education that Minuteman volunteers obtained in this manner was described in ways that valued it more than other sources of information.

“[The MCC] is more for the ‘boots on the ground,’ average American citizen,” a member of the MCC leadership told me.

We have members with, I can think of one in particular, that has a ninth grade education. Salt of the earth. I mean the guy is limited from an academic standpoint, but he’s one of the smartest members I know. I mean this guy is astute. He picks things up. I mean, he’s a tradesman, but he knows what is right for his country, his state, and his community. He’s done the education. He’s done the footwork and all the background information and I would put this man with a ninth grade education up against any one of... 150 professors.

If the Minutemen provided a special, more accurate, understanding of the problems facing the United States, it also made them feel isolated. Away from camp, many members hide their identities as Minutemen to anyone except their family or close friends. When they go to any of the local shops or casinos some, not all, members elect to take off their Minuteman IDs, shirts, and caps. In their home communities, many members make sure to avoid wearing their Minuteman clothes. One member, who lives in Los Angeles, told me that he does not put a bumper sticker on his truck because he is afraid that people who live in his largely Latino neighborhood will “key,” or deliberately scratch his truck as a sign of their disapproval.

Joshua told me that he saw “no point” in attracting “trouble” by “publicizing” his identity as a Minuteman.

I don't publicize [being a Minuteman]. At home people know I am. But no, I don't publicize it. Even at home I wear this hat. I don't wear a Minuteman hat. I don't wear Minuteman shirts at home when I go to the stores and stuff. There's no point in looking for trouble. There are people that resent us. I saw a sign on one car one day a few years ago—there's a car parked by our Jack In The Box that said...some derogatory mark about the Minutemen written on the back window. So I know there are people out there that might cause you a problem and I just don't want to antagonize anybody and get myself in trouble especially if I've got my grandson with me or I'm with my family or whatever. There's no point in that. I've heard that some Minutemen have been accosted even at their homes and stuff. I don't know how true it is and I don't want it to happen to me. When I go around here, no, I take my badge off when I go into the casinos.

For some, hiding their identity as Minutemen away from Camp Vigilance is about their personal safety. Others hide their identity because they do not wish to be confrontational. Recall, that Howard posited that some like-minded people would not get involved with the Minutemen because they feared that they would be viewed as confrontational or racist.

For some Minuteman volunteers, however, Minuteman activity was itself framed as non-confrontational. As Russell Grant, a former police officer from Staten Island, told me joining the Minutemen was a way for him to express himself politically in a non-confrontational way even though the Minutemen were becoming, in his mind, too confrontational.

I went to one Tea Party, you know, and that was in the very beginning, the first time it was announced. But, I didn't feel out of place, I just felt...I didn't feel that I wanted to be as vocal as they were. I figure I could vote and do that. I don't like confrontations or I don't like to wear my beliefs on my sleeve, you know. That's one of my reasons I was leaving the Minuteman Corps, 'cause their beliefs are in your face to a certain extent. You know, in other words, sometimes they rally, which I've never been to a rally. Or they, um, they're outspoken when they're in camp. And I'm outspoken about certain things but I'm not outspoken about, uh, things that...might be in conflict with other people. I like a good discussion but I don't want to push my beliefs on somebody else.

"So you wouldn't classify what you do down here as confrontational," I asked.

“No,” he replied. “Because that’s the basic, um, creed is that you don’t confront them. You observe and report. And I thought that that was the right way to do it.”

Given his aversion towards confrontation, joining the Minutemen was a difficult decision for Russell.

“I was very aware that I was maybe taking sides, you know. Nobody likes to gang up on any particular group of people. I guess I kind of thought that maybe, you know, that act (of joining the Minutemen) was wrong. There’s that confrontation stuff again. [I] thought maybe I was ganging up on them. I finally decided, yes, I was gonna do it.”

“You don’t think you are ganging up on anyone?” I asked.  
Not now. I’m trying to think of the feeling I had when the first time I came down here. It was almost like I would never assimilate. And I still don’t. I don’t go out on the patio and bullshit with the guys. I might agree with a lot of things they say. If anybody says anything off color it just bothers me. And I can’t justify that. I can’t justify racial epithets. I just can’t stand that. We had somebody in the Minutemen that were going around doing things that I didn’t agree with. They were circumventing certain rescue groups. They took the water from some of these outposts that were meant [for immigrants crossing through the desert].<sup>15</sup> I could never be that outward. I could never do something like that.

Of course others had no problem broadcasting their identities as Minutemen. One such member proudly blasted what he called “patriotic music” from his truck during a protest event. Others proudly displayed Minuteman stickers on their trucks and cars.

Nevertheless, as with Russell, many Minutemen described feelings of trepidation when first joining the Minutemen at Camp Vigilance.

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<sup>15</sup> Russell was describing water stations provided by a group called the Border Angels. The Border Angels leave bottles of water, cards that inform migrants of their rights, and sometimes maps for migrants that cross through the desert along well-travelled trails. At this time in the interview the person that he was talking about, and whose RV he was sharing entered the vehicle and interrupted our interview. Russell quickly changed the subject and later told me that the man was emptying the bottles of water by cutting holes in them, a practice that was immediately forbidden by the MCC’s leadership when they learned of his actions.

For most Minuteman members, the decision to join and participate in border watch operations was fraught with concerns about whom the Minutemen were and how radical, violent, or racist they might be. David West, who flies down to San Diego from northern California, said that when he went down to the border for his first Minuteman muster he was prepared to leave immediately if he was greeted by a group of radical racists. “I wanted to make sure that I would align with an organization that would ensure my safety as much as humanly possible. Meaning what I was attracted to with MCDC was the criminal background check and the vetting process,” he said.

I didn’t want to align with a radical group. My definition of a radical group (is a group) such as a KKK or a La Raza type that was focused on race or gender or religion or socioeconomics. But (I) wanted to focus on this issue of illegal immigration. I told [my wife] on my first flight down, that if I get down there and find a bunch of knuckleheads with sheets on their heads and swastikas on their foreheads, then you know I was catching the next flight back. And what I found was quite the opposite. I found almost every race represented, almost every religion represented, both genders, socioeconomically the full range, (and) from an academic standpoint a ninth grade education up to multiple PhDs. And so I thought this was a good cross section of Americana.

Members often expressed similar anxieties about joining the MCC, but most quickly came to like the organization and the people that made up its membership. One woman’s son was working in the area just days before she was due to participate in her first muster. He called his mother and told her that he did not think she should make the trip. He told her that as he was working on the telephone poles overlooking the highway, and he saw “this bunch of Mexicans running up and down over these little hills down there and here’s some lady in her late 30s/40s...gun in one hand [walkie-talkie] like this in the other, screaming and running after them. And then all of a sudden here comes the

border patrol—the helicopter, the cars, ATVs and all of that. And he said ‘Mom I don’t think you oughtta go down there. I don’t think they’re sane.’ You know.”

Her son’s words of cautions did not deter her however.

So I said ‘well I’ll go ‘cause I’ve already talked to [the Minutemen] and all the rest of this—been vetted and all that. But I said ‘I’ve got the food,’ I said ‘but I can turn around and leave in five minutes.’ I said ‘I’m totally independent and can do what I want.’ And so I came down here. I looked around (and) talked to ‘em. I kept asking about the training for the guns. Now I’m a Sherriff, I know how to handle a gun. I also know if there are people who don’t know how to handle it I’m getting the hell out of here, you know. I don’t want anything to do with it. And I came down, met these people. Just loved em all. They know what they’re doing. They’re safe. They’re super conscientious and all that.

When we consider the concerns that MCC volunteers had when they first joined the Minutemen, it is not surprising to understand why some members would hide their Minuteman identity. They too feared that they were joining a radical racist group. What would others think?

Camp Vigilance provided members with a safe space to share their true opinions on a variety of social issues without fear. The transformation of Camp Vigilance from a poorly equipped and largely empty campground into a fully functioning, and very comfortable base of operations contributed to this sense of community and belonging.

### Camp Vigilance as Home Away from Home

My back was killing me. For two days straight I had been bent over the handle of a pickaxe digging trenches. First we dug a trench across the Camp Vigilance property and then we dug one at a private residence not far from camp.

The trenches were not part of any defensive breastworks or to serve some military or security purpose. One trench we dug so that we could run electrical conduit from a

resident's house to a radio tower that the Minutemen were installing on the resident's property to extend the MCC's range of communications. The other trench we dug so that we could connect the camp barbeque to a propane tank that was going to be installed in the coming weeks.

Though the Minutemen spent some time erecting radio towers on properties owned by local residents with whom the MCC entered agreements to pay to rent the space, most of their physical labor was spent on improving the Camp Vigilance property to make it more comfortable for the MCC volunteers. When they first leased Camp Vigilance the stagecoach depot was rat infested. The walls and ceiling lacked insulation. Cracks in the walls and ceiling allowed the elements and local wildlife free access. Volunteers fresh from operations took turns standing in front of the fire as they warmed frozen limbs. Mostly devoid of electrical outlets and wiring, the Minutemen instead ran orange extension cords throughout the building.

First, the Minutemen attached bunks directly to the walls in the eastern wing of the depot. Then they closed the gaps between the ceiling and the walls. Next they installed electrical wiring, outlets and conduits, and a ceiling fan. Then they put in insulation and drywall. They removed the existing windows and door at the front of the building and installed a bigger door and windows. Finally, they built a deck in front of the building.

Next to the bunkhouse they parked an office trailer that serves as the camp's bathroom and Comm. Center. They installed a septic tank, showers, and toilets. They attached a 100-foot radio tower to the front of the trailer.

They also built some home improvements around camp. They erected two flags, lights, and installed RV hookups. They created an artificial waterfall by building a cement trough, and attaching a pump and water lines, on and around a rock formation that sat behind the patio just outside the bunkhouse's back door.

Although the owner of the property helped with a few of the improvements, most of the work was done by Minuteman volunteers and with funds collected by the MCC.

The improvements made Camp Vigilance a comfortable base of operations. The bunkhouse provided shelter from the elements, a place to meet, talk, and eat. The Comm. Center trailer provided a place to store advanced surveillance equipment, a place to maintain communications with operation teams and the Border Patrol, and a place to take a shower.

From the first time I visited Camp Vigilance in 2007 to my final trip in 2009 the Minutemen had transformed what had been a simple two building property into comfortable home away from home. Some members relocated to Camp Vigilance full time. Others made use of the property in between musters as a vacation spot. In the event of a natural disaster or other emergency, MCC leadership promised that card-carrying members and their families would be welcome to shelter at Camp Vigilance.

However, the enduring power of Camp Vigilance and the MCC was their adaptability. For those who sought a safe place where like-minded people could come together and talk politics, Camp Vigilance provided that. Similarly, the MCC created operations that also allowed those who sought therapy and togetherness to literally watch the border, while also sharing stories and ideas. For those who wanted adventure or an adrenaline rush Camp Vigilance and MCC operations could also accommodate them.

Feeling a shared sense of community and belonging was just one of many reasons that attracted MCC members to participating in border patrol activities. Most of the time spent at Camp Vigilance is marked by the tedious passage of hour after hour spent sitting in a quiet truck, or in a collapsible lawn chair, or behind bushes or boulders, scanning an apparently empty landscape. Whether they sought the excitement that the threat of danger provided, or the quiet camaraderie that a vehicular operation provided, border patrol operations were genuinely fun for most MCC members. The promise of catching sight of a group of migrants staging across the border, or passing by their hidden location, energized all MCC members whether they felt threatened or not.

“A Secure Border is not as Fun  
as an Unsecure Border”

The border was dead. At least that was the talk around camp. The same could be said about Camp Vigilance. During the weekend, despite volunteer numbers in the twenties, every operation had failed to produce results. Truth was, it had been at least a week since any Minutemen had spotted anyone trying to cross the border. The Border Patrol was busy as usual. On random encounters in the field, a few agents had exchanged brief stories of groups of migrants that they had caught and where. Their jeeps and trucks often sped by us on the border roads that abutted the fence, or down the road adjacent to the camp entrance. But so far, migrants had eluded the Minutemen’s gaze.

As Sunday night came, and as the younger members and those who lived locally departed for their jobs, their homes, and their families, those who were retired or those from northern California stayed behind to carry on.



We were all tired. Day after day and night after night of operations with nothing to show for them had begun to take its toll. A week at the border turned to two for some members and the weariness showed in hunched shoulders and quiet stares. Meals were eaten largely in silence as the three, four, and five members who remained prepared themselves for another day or night of operations. At twice-daily meetings, leaders took a bit longer to get meetings started, volunteers took a bit longer to suggest and volunteer for operations.

At the top of the whiteboard that the meeting leaders used to write down operation sites, teams, and call signs, the ghost of a message that was written a few days before still remained. It read: “Thought for the day: A secure border is not nearly as much fun as an insecure border.” While none of us were under the illusion that the border was “secure,” from the look of the hunched shoulders, and blank stares, and bags hanging heavily under our collective eyes, it was clear that no one was having fun.

Phil Smith was one of the few MCC volunteers still present during that mid-week meeting. Phil is a big man. Not only is he tall—he stands well over six feet—but he is broad in the shoulders, possessing a stout frame and big, powerful hands. Though age has softened his features, particularly around the middle, he still strikes an imposing figure. While his physique is intimidating, his demeanor is warm and gentle. Well-practiced laugh lines pattern his bespectacled face. When I return to the border he often greets me with a broad smile and a sturdy, though not uncomfortable handshake. Phil does not speak often—he typically spends his free time at camp alone in his truck listening to talk radio or speaking to his wife on the phone—but when he does he speaks with calm and measured tones. When he speaks of politics, he often shakes his head and, though often

expressing outrage, does not raise his voice. Otherwise, he is quick to smile and quicker to laugh.

Though he appeared to be calm most days, Phil, who is retired and lives in northern California, seemed ready to call it quits on the Minutemen and on the border. Phil had never witnessed anyone trying to cross the border. Despite spending weeks at a time during every month long muster in over a years worth of service with the MCC, he had not been involved in any apprehensions or successful operations. Although he would never say so, Phil looked tired. When he climbed in and out of vehicles, the accumulating aches and pains that cold weather, cramped sleeping quarters—like me Paul slept in a small, one-person tent—and hilly terrain had resulted in audible grunts and sighs. Prior to the meetings start, Paul sat down with a heavy sigh, and sank down into his chair. He turned to the person next to him and started talking about whether he should stay at Camp Vigilance through the next week as he had originally planned, or go home early.

During the week, life at Camp Vigilance was fairly dull. Too few volunteers meant that operations were mostly limited to the camp property—if they took place at all. A lack of leadership meant that members would have to decide where and when they would go out on ops.

That night, only Phil Smith and Howard Hutchins volunteered to go out on operations. Margie Cuthbert, a seventy-year-old firebrand who speaks a mile-a-minute reluctantly volunteered to work comms; she tried desperately to get someone else to take comms so that she could go out on ops with Howard and Phil. But with no one willing to volunteer for comms, she relented. Kurt Vandemark, a barrel-chested man whose

ruggedly handsome features made him look like the Brawny lumberjack, volunteered to patrol the camp grounds as camp security.

Phil and Howard set up their truck a few hundred yards to the east of the Comm. Center under a copse of oak trees. I was working in the meeting room of the bunkhouse, writing up notes and sitting in front of the fire. Periodically, Margie would come in and say hello, radio in hand. She was antsy to “get some action” as she put it. She expressed that she really wanted to go out on ops and “have some fun” but somebody had to stay behind and run comms. Kurt too would at times walk in, beanie atop his head, heavy jacket and gloves adorned to protect him from the near-freezing temperatures. Otherwise, only the sounds of crickets outside and the occasional pop from the fire broke the silence.

As it neared midnight, Margie burst through the door to the meeting room. Panting, she said that she needed me to come to the Comm. Center right away and take over the radio. Howard and Phil had spotted a group of “illegals,” and she needed to meet up with Border Patrol who was on their way. Before I could respond she changed her mind and ran back out of the meeting room. I walked outside and stood under the lights that illuminated the area between the meeting room and the Comm. Center.

Margie walked down to the gate at the camp entrance to greet a Border Patrol agent that had just driven through. Seconds later the truck drove up to and past the Comm. Center and disappeared beneath the trees. Margie slowly made her way back to the Comm. Center, periodically speaking into the walkie-talkie radio. When she got back she asked rhetorically, “why don’t I get to have any fun?”

I returned to the meeting room to wait for Howard and Phil to return. Less than a half hour later I heard a tremendous “Woo hoo!” come from outside. Margie, again out of breath and flushed, stormed into the room. “They got em!” she crowed.

A small group of migrants—less than twenty—had walked right past Howard and Phil’s vehicle, she told me. Afraid that they would scare them into running, Phil and Howard sat still and quiet for a few tense moments as they waited for the migrants to walk past all the time fearing that they would see the truck or the men inside. The darkness protected them, however. Once the group had passed their position, Phil called Margie on the radio, who in turn phoned the Border Patrol station. Once Border Patrol was on the scene, it took only a few minutes before they had apprehended the entire group.

Howard and Phil returned to the meeting room a few minutes later. The fire was still going strong, Howard and Phil took turns warming themselves in front of it. After warming himself, Phil sat down and stared into space. While Howard recounted their experience, Phil just shook his head in disbelief. I could almost see his heart pounding in his chest.

The next morning Phil was rejuvenated. The weekend crew had started coming in that day. Whereas he seemed ready to quit just the day before, the next morning he appeared to be reenergized as he told and retold his experience to anyone who would listen. That morning he was the first to volunteer for operations. And for the rest of the month he volunteered to participate in operations, all of them in the same spot on the Camp Vigilance property. That event took on such significance that he continued to talk about it over a year after it happened.

Even Margie's repeated lamentations about not being able to "have fun" reveal the ways that volunteers thought of Minuteman operations. This thrill that members felt when they encountered migrants crossing or staging to cross the border, was an oft-cited feeling regardless of whether or not they felt "threatened" or in danger.

For David West, who had never been in the military or in law enforcement, and for whom border watch operations provided "a little bit of excitement," the Minutemen provided him with the opportunity, "to give back some in a way that [he] hadn't been able to in the past." For David, the Minutemen provided him with an opportunity to get "physically involved" by "immersing myself into the process, the cause from right where it was all happening, which is that line between the two countries." Participating in border patrol operations was a way for members to regain control over what they viewed as a dangerously out of control situation.

Minuteman musters and border patrol operations were key to members' efforts to construct meanings about the significance of the border, the dangers of immigration, and the proper role of government. For volunteers like Darren and Ed Asbury who led our hike, the borderlands are a place of opportunity that hosts a variety of potential dangers. A lone bootie discarded by a migrant en route to their homes, their families, and their jobs, reveals a bad guy that got away. Bags left behind, their contents discarded or taken, hint that the violence of the drug trade could be hidden behind any rock, tree, or bush. Yet, the border also became a place of adventure, leisure, camaraderie, and entertainment for MCC members. Whereas, for the migrant the border is a place to hide, elude, escape, and overcome, a place on the way to or from home, for the Minutemen, the border is a temporary place where they can craft a home away from home that is, in some ways,

safer and more true than the one in which they live out their lives. According to George Lipsitz

The white spatial imaginary idealizes ‘pure’ and homogenous spaces, controlled environments, and predictable patterns of design and behavior. It seeks to hide social problems rather than solve them. The white spatial imaginary promotes the quest for individual escape rather than encouraging democratic deliberations about the social problems and contradictory social relations that affect us all. (Lipsitz 2011:29).

MCC members constructed a physical and social space that differed dramatically from its surroundings and that allowed them to escape the perceived realities of an out of control world back home in favor of the fantasy of Camp Vigilance and its borderland surroundings. Not only did the MCC construct Camp Vigilance as a fully equipped base camp complete with advanced surveillance technologies and communications technologies, but they also created Camp Vigilance with comfort and community in mind. Far from a spartan site designed with utilitarian concerns in mind, Camp Vigilance was equal parts resort and workspace. The built in deck, the backdoor grotto, and the fireplace-warmed meeting room, provided MCC members with a safe space where they could more fully reveal and construct their own personal and political beliefs without fear of being labeled racist or xenophobic. Camp Vigilance provided clear, albeit simplistic, evidence that the border could be controlled.

Participating in MCC musters and operations was both a political statement and a remedy. MCC members participated in media spectacles and border patrols as a way of both constructing the image of an out of control border, as well as way of regaining control. As I discussed in the previous chapter, joining the MCC was motivated largely by feeling disempowered and victimized as a result of economic, political, and cultural

change in their communities away from the border. Participating in Minuteman operations provided MCC volunteers with a tactics for addressing these anxieties. Participating in border patrol activities became less about controlling immigration, but about regaining a sense of control over politics, the economy, and the nation.

However, when they encountered the border, they experienced new anxieties. They experienced a border that was often absent, not easily identified, and they encountered individuals and processes that did not neatly fit within a good/bad binary. The experience of the Minutemen illustrates the way that the meaning of the border is constantly shifting.

Participating in border watch operations further provided members with an exciting and thrilling way to serve their country. MCC musters provided members with a place where they could craft for themselves a sense of belonging and identity. At Camp Vigilance, and while on operations, MCC volunteers crafted a collective identity that defined national belonging by the color of one's skin, where one was born, how one earned a living, one's relationship with the government, what one did in their free time, and by one's political beliefs. For the Minutemen, the border is a site where definitions about Americanness, patriotism, and belonging are crafted and enacted—where one can become, define, and express what it means to be “ultra-ultra American,” “ultra-ultra conservative,” and “ultra-ultra patriotic.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE MINUTEMEN AND THE BORDER PATROL

In the previous chapter I detailed the relationship between the MCC and their border milieu. I described how they view the border as a dangerous and/or out of control space. This experience duplicated the way they viewed their home communities. For some, the dangers of the border were one of the main reasons that they chose to address their concerns of an out of control world/border. For others, Minuteman activities provided them a safe space to come together and share ideas and experiences with like-minded individuals. Whether they came to the border to create a safe space or to seek out adventure and excitement, virtually all members were attracted to the excitement of hunting “bad guys.”

In this chapter, I describe the relationship between the MCC and state agencies and actors. Specifically, I track the ambivalent relationship between the Minutemen and the Border Patrol. I draw primarily on two separate events: the first was an operation that resulted in the apprehension by the Border Patrol of over 40 migrants; the second event was one in which an MCC member was stopped by Border Patrol agents. Together these demonstrate what happens when the state meets Minuteman expectations and what happens when that relationship breaks down. I finish by discussing the, at times, radical choices that MCC leaders and members made to facilitate state cooperation.



### The Eye in the Sky

In the early hours of a cold April morning at Camp Vigilance I woke to the sound of a Minuteman outside my tent urging me to wake up and head over to the Comm. Center as soon as possible.

My tent sat under a large oak tree set a few dozen feet from the southern edge of the clearing at the center of the camp. Next to my tent was a third-wheel camper. A few other trailers and tents were scattered throughout the trees that dotted the area between the clearing and the southern property line.

After awaking, I hastily dressed, driven more by the freezing temperatures rather than any desire to investigate the clamor outside my tent. After dressing, I exited the tent, and made my way to the Communications Center where a small handful of Minutemen were assembled. Some of the volunteers were in the process of equipping themselves with radios, night vision scopes, pistols and other equipment, while others stood there chatting and drinking coffee as they either waited for their compatriots to gear up, or waited for instructions from the Minuteman leadership. Roger Patton, a thick-set man of average height in his mid-fifties, and long-time member of the MCC's leadership, stepped out of the trailer and began talking to the group. He informed us that a team of Minutemen that were staked out at the northwest corner of the camp property had spotted a group of "illegals" on the property. Our job was to go out and find them.

The team that had issued the call for help were stationed at the "Eye In The Sky." The Minutemen called the Eye In The Sky an MSU, short for Mobile Surveillance Unit, which made it sound impressive and official. In reality, the Eye was an SUV with a

thermal imaging camera attached to it. Attached to the rear bumper was an aluminum pole. Atop the pole a thermal imaging camera sat on a small platform. Minuteman volunteers controlled the camera remotely from inside the vehicle where they could zoom, pan, and tilt it. The vehicle sat atop a promontory overlooking the camp. Trees and brush from below rose in front of the vehicle and hid it from view. Only the camera rose above the trees making the vehicle virtually invisible at night.

A few hours before dawn, the team at the Eye In The Sky spotted a group of approximately twenty people walking in a line down a road that traversed a hill to south of Camp Vigilance. The road ran up to the camp boundary at its easternmost edge. As the group of people reached the road they disappeared from view. As the rest of us slept, the Minutemen at the “Eye” radioed the Comm. Center who relayed the information to the Border Patrol. Moments passed as the Minutemen tried to find the group of people with the camera when the camera caught a glimpse of bright faces atop darker bodies right in front of the vehicle. The Minutemen turned on the headlights and the startled migrants scattered in all directions. It was then that we were woken to try to track down the scattered migrants. Roger asked me if I wanted to go along with him and Tara.

When Roger is not busy volunteering with the largest minuteman organization in California, or hunting “bad guys,” he is a loan officer. As a member of the MCC’s leadership group he has also spent a great deal of time speaking to the media and the public on immigration and border issues. As a result, Roger speaks with an easy, if slightly rehearsed, demeanor. The strength of his convictions comes through not as a passionate appeal to one’s emotions, but as a carefully considered and rational appeal to

“common sense.” His ability to stay on message and deliver facts and talking points without deviation is truly remarkable.

Like Roger, Tara has years of experience on the border. Unlike Roger who devotes his time exclusively to the MCC, Tara often participates in operations with other local minuteman groups. Tara prefers dusk to dawn operations that require hours spent slowly crawling and climbing through and over the rocky desert terrain. Tara, who works in the entertainment industry, is also very selective with whom she will go out on “ops,” preferring to work with volunteers who are often trained law enforcement or ex-military.

Roger drove us south past the Camp Vigilance entrance while Tara sat “shotgun” and I sat in the extended cab. The truck shook and bounced violently as we traversed the unpaved and poorly maintained local roads. Roger proceeded with caution, slowly inching his way towards the peak of a hill that was situated directly opposite Camp Vigilance. The crest of the hill was where the group of suspected migrants had purportedly first popped into view on the Eye in the Sky’s monitor. As he drove, Roger explained that he wanted to stop the “illegals” from “TBSing” or “turning back south,” and fleeing back to Mexico. Roger liberally used acronyms when speaking. Roger coined the term NYD. He often used official acronyms like “OTM” for “other than Mexican.” At times he would also refer to drug smugglers as “POIs,” or persons of interest.

As we drove, Tara searched the desert scrub to either side of the road for signs of people hiding and for footprints left in the desert sand. Tara used a new night vision scope that she had recently bought to search for signs of anyone moving about in the night. She told us that her “new toy” was a Generation II, “mil-spec (military specification)” scope that she had recently purchased for a little over \$1,000. It was just a

small expense compared to the between \$10 and \$20 thousand that she later told me she had donated and spent in service to the Minutemen.

Low clouds and the bouncing truck made it difficult for Tara to see, so she periodically told Roger to stop the truck as she looked through her scope. The truck's headlights produced the ambient light necessary to use the scope in the cloudy conditions.

Periodically, Roger shut off the truck's engine and listened. He told me that sound travels in strange ways out here on the border. A person could be whispering hundreds of yards away but sound like they were standing right next to us. He said that you'll usually hear "illegals" long before you'll see them.

An hour after we began our search, a Border Patrol jeep approached and stopped next to us. The agent, a young male in his twenties, told us that it had been a busy night for the Border Patrol. The Border Patrol, he reported, had already caught three groups in the surrounding area, but were still searching for the ones that had passed through Camp Vigilance. He did not express whether or not they were likely to find the missing group.

The exchange between Roger and the Border Patrol agent was typical of most encounters between Minutemen and Border Patrol agents. The exchange is often brief and cordial. Typically, when the Minutemen and Border Patrol encounter one another, the Minutemen explain where they are going or what they are doing. Minutemen will often ask what cross border traffic is like in the area. Depending upon the agent, s/he may reveal if they are or have been tracking border crossers. They may also share what traffic has been like over the past few days or weeks.

Shortly after our encounter with the Border Patrol agent, Roger got on the radio and informed the radio operator at Camp Vigilance to call off the search. We returned back to the camp and headed over to the depot to debrief with the rest of the MCC.

Roger led the meeting as he and the rest of the members began to strategize about how best to improve their tactics for the next time a group of migrants tried to cross through Camp Vigilance. Implicit in their discussion was the confident belief that another group of “illegals” would come through again. After some discussion Roger began to outline the makings of a plan. It consisted of trapping the “illegals” on the property by closing off all exits and surrounding them on the property. Without a way to get to their destination or “TBS,” the Minutemen, with the help of the Border Patrol, would be able to round up the clandestine border crossers. Roger anticipated that any migrants that they found would voluntarily sit down when confronted by the Minutemen and wait patiently for the Border Patrol to come and pick them up.

Though the MCC’s official policy was to “observe and report” suspected border crossings to the Border Patrol, they often participated in efforts that ensured a more active role in the apprehension of clandestine border crossers.

I have been confronted by illegals and have um taken them under my protection because they’ve walked right up to me and I had no other choice. But then I don’t really talk to them or anything. I just tell them to sit down [and I] call the Border Patrol. It happened once or twice that’s about it. And they . . . didn’t have any animosities or anything. They just were caught and so they submitted. I always got the impressions that the border patrol had this unspoken deal with the illegals that if they didn’t run and cause them troubles that they would treat ‘em fairly. You know it all depends on what they’re hiding I guess. If they’re just coming across to go to work or something they don’t want to get into more trouble than they’re already in.

MCC members often described these “confrontations” as passive encounters where migrants submitted to the MCC of their own accord, and without any direction by MCC members.

The new plan aimed at placing the MCC in position to actively assist in the apprehension of clandestine border crossers. Unfortunately, the effort would have to wait until next weekend at the soonest. The weekend was drawing to a close. All of the MCC leadership were returning home, as were most of the volunteers. In addition, the digital video recorder that attached to the thermal camera broke during that morning’s operation. Without the DVR, the Minutemen could not use the thermal camera remotely, nor could they record the images that the thermal camera produced.

The morning’s events were characterized by a series of failures that required correction. The Minutemen had spotted a sizeable group of “illegals.” Not only had they failed to track the group once they reached the “Eye in the Sky,” but they failed to record the event. The “illegals” had escaped apprehension, and the Minutemen did not even have evidence that they had ever crossed. Perhaps by the time Roger was able to mobilize the sleeping members into multiple search parties, the startled migrants had been able to move on to their final destination, slipping past the camp’s northern fence and off towards the interstate. Perhaps the Border Patrol, informed by the Minutemen, were able to track the group north of the camp’s borders and return them back to Mexico. We never learned. That the Border Patrol had been busy all night further emphasized the relative lack of power that the Minutemen had to effect change. Whereas the Minutemen inform the Border Patrol when they witness people crossing into the country without authorization, the Border Patrol rarely shares information with the Minutemen. The

Minutemen are often left ignorant about where the hottest crossing points are or even if the Border Patrol apprehended anyone whom the Minutemen reported. As Carl Braun explained in his book, “Information generally only goes one way with our government counterparts and I guess, that’s OK with us” (Braun 2007:52).

The next weekend Roger, Tara and the rest of the Minutemen got a chance to put their new plan into action. After midnight I, along with two Minuteman members—Margie and Mark, a retiree and a veteran MCDC volunteer from Arizona who was participating in his first muster at Camp Vigilance—were directed to set up in a vehicle approximately a quarter mile northwest of the camp, near the highway. Our job was to look out for individuals crossing near the north side of the property. If, however, another group tried to cross through camp we were instructed to redeploy in an area in the southern part of camp to help seal the exits from camp.

At nearly the same time as the weekend before (4:00 AM), the team at the Eye in the Sky spotted two groups of about twenty migrants marching down the same road as the previous weekend’s group. As they tracked the migrants’ progress through the thermal camera, teams that were on stand-by, including ours, prepared to relocate to our predetermined locations. This time the MSU team tracked the migrants until they reached their hidden location at which time they “lit up” the group with their headlights. Startled, the individuals scattered in every direction. At this point the entire camp was alerted. We were contacted over the radio and told to move to a location under a copse of oak trees located in the center of camp.

Bedlam erupted over the radio as teams scrambled to take up new positions all over the camp. Members forgot their call signs and radio protocol, headlights, flashlights,

and spotlights periodically flashed through the darkness. The sound of diesel engines that marked the arrival of the Border Patrol echoed against the hills to our north and south.

When we reached our new destination Margie stopped in the shadows cast by a grove of live oaks. Mark grabbed a million candlepower spotlight and began searching the brush from his position in the front passenger's seat. Despite Margie's protestations, Mark decided to charge off into the brush and leave us alone with the truck. The light shining back and forth across the brush marked his passage from view.

Margie was livid. "You don't do that. You're partners, you don't do that. . . . They could've circled back and grabbed the car," she complained.

Chaos settled into calm until suddenly, Roger's voice came through on the radio informing us that "[Border Patrol] caught 28 of them." Within minutes a single Border Patrol agent escorted a man, his hands tied with a plastic zip tie, past our position. Less than a minute later, out of the darkness followed a group of fourteen men tied to each other and walking in two parallel lines from north to south, with a Border Patrol agent leading them and another trailing behind. In front of the trailing agent, a man, his hands also tied, carried a stack of "booties." Neither the Border Patrol agents nor the men they were escorting said anything to us as they passed, nor did we.

As night became day, Roger drove past us with Mark sitting in the passenger seat of his truck. Roger instructed us to drive up to the hill at the back of the Camp Vigilance property in case the remaining "illegals" tried to get past the camp fence.

At the back of the property a dirt road runs west to east up and down over a series of hills. Atop each peak a Minuteman team was stationed. Margie parked her vehicle at the top of a hill and we both stepped out. I walked over to a team that was situated at the



top of the next hill, a few hundred feet away from our position when a male voice rang out on the radio. "I got two!" he said. A few minutes later, a tall, thin Minuteman marched out of the bushes with two men in tow. They both had bronze skin and appeared to be in their late-20s to mid-30s. They both wore baseball caps and hooded sweatshirts. One sweatshirt bore the New York Jets logo, the other was blank. They did not say anything as they walked up to and stood beside a pick up truck that was parked at the top of the hill. I asked in Spanish if they wanted water. A Minuteman asked in English if he could take their picture. Other than that, the Minutemen and the two captured men did not communicate to one another.

After a few minutes a pale-skinned Border Patrol agent arrived on foot. He instructed the two men to sit down. They complied immediately, and sat against the truck's back tire. With their knees folded up in front of them they each rested their arms on their knees. The Border Patrol Agent quietly asked them a few very brief questions and the men responded. He spoke with a non-native accent in barely audible, clipped tones. I could not hear their conversation. As the agent stood over them, with his foot he pulled the migrants' feet out so that their legs laid flat against the ground. Again with his foot, he tapped the migrants' feet and looked at the soles of their shoes. He asked us if we would continue to watch the two men as he went back to get a vehicle. We waited. The mood amongst the Minutemen was jolly and light. They joked and chatted, largely ignoring the two men sitting on the ground. More Minutemen came up to our position to witness the spectacle and take pictures.

The men sitting on the ground looked surprisingly calm as a group of armed men stood about them. I stood back from the group feeling uneasy. In contrast, the Minutemen were in a jovial mood. They cracked jokes and told stories, often breaking into laughter.

About a half hour later, a white oversized pickup crested the hill to the east and approached our position. An MCC volunteer drove. In the bed of the truck sat the same Border Patrol agent and a bronze skin man whose wrists were tied. The Border Patrol agent instructed the two men sitting on the ground to get into the bed of the truck and they drove back down towards the main camp.

After they left, everyone returned back to the bunkhouse. What began as a chaotic morning settled into a calm yet euphoric mood that infected everyone. Each individual told and retold their part in the successful capture of such a large group. One member, who had been on duty earlier in the night and was asleep during most of the morning's events, lamented that he hadn't gotten to see any "illegals," but praised the rest of the group for doing a good job. Roger and the Eye in the Sky team returned with a video taken from the thermal camera.

The Minutemen posted the video onto YouTube and posted details of the night's events on the Minuteman Civil Defense Corps website. The purpose of taking the video and posting the report was to highlight the severity of the "illegal immigration problem," to highlight the minutemen's apparent success, and to request assistance from other minuteman volunteers. On their website, the Minutemen reported that 44 migrants had been apprehended by Border Patrol. "Throughout the entire ordeal," they reported, "BP requested our assistance in the search and later told us how impressed they were with our handling of the situation." Additionally, the Minutemen admitted that traffic slowed over

the next few days but that “They’ll be back again in a day or so.” “Your Country (sic) is being invaded,” they advised. “You are needed at the border. Be there or be overrun.”

There were two key differences between the previous weekend’s operation and the following weekend’s. First, the Minutemen took a more active role in the apprehension of the migrants crossing through Camp Vigilance. Minuteman leaders positioned teams throughout the area surrounding Camp Vigilance and made sure that there were few avenues for the trapped migrants to escape through the Minuteman cordon. Second, the Minutemen worked in greater cooperation with the Border Patrol. Minuteman trackers traced the movements of migrants that made it past the northern boundary fence, they transported apprehended migrants and Border Patrol agents from the fence to the road where the Border Patrol transport vehicle was located, and they watched apprehended migrants until an agent could pick them up.

To correct their failures, Roger and the Minutemen sought to alter their relationship to migrants and the Border Patrol alike. By acting more like the Border Patrol they would be better able to ensure that the Border Patrol acted in ways that the Minutemen could better influence and monitor. In this way they better guaranteed “success.” In the following section I explore how the Minutemen made sense of their relationship with the Minutemen. In so doing I explain how the Minutemen gauged “success.”

#### Relationship with the Border Patrol

In the course of participating in MCC operations, many MCC volunteers came into contact with Border Patrol agents in the field. Much of the time MCC members

simply watched as the Border Patrol passed by. On other occasions MCC members and Border Patrol agents would share a wave or a nod. And at other times MCC members would stop and chat with Border Patrol agents. One member described what he considered a typical interaction: “We’ve said hello to some [Border Patrol agents] but not a lot. Not often. Often we just wave as we go by. We don’t want to stop them from their duties. And they may not want to get chummy in that sense. It’s hard enough to even get chummy with your own people knowing that tomorrow they might die.” MCC members understood that the Border Patrol had a job to do which explained their seeming indifference towards the MCC.

MCC members appreciated the effort that Border Patrol agents gave in “securing” the border. “Boots on the ground guys in the field for the most part are dedicated. They put themselves at great risk. They’re put into insane conditions nobody else would be put in. Even the military, police, Sheriff, nobody’s put into these conditions and expected to do something and put their lives in danger.” For the MCC, Border Patrol agents had a thankless and dangerous job.

According to the members of the MCC, the Border Patrol appreciated the help that the MCC provided. One member described the relationship between the MCC and the Border Patrol as a “mutual admiration society.” Howard, who participated in the inaugural Minuteman Project/MCDC border protest in April 2005, said that Border Patrol field agents have always expressed appreciation for the efforts of the minutemen.

Right from the get-go, even in Arizona when we were brand new there and I guess people didn’t quite know what to expect from us, the troops warmed up to us right away. They admitted to us that they were not supposed to be fraternizing. But these were at least the few that stopped to chat with us, maybe they had seniority or something, they said, “I don’t give a shit.” They said they weren’t

supposed to but...So we were friendly right away. And in fact the last day that we were there [in Arizona], I still find it moving to think about it, that stand in Arizona we were parked out on the Nacho (sic) line and for a couple of miles there we were stationed two men to a location, every . . . three hundred yards. We had visual sightings and we were in radio contact with a little FRS radio. We were there 24/7. And so nothing got past us. We shut it down. And on the last day when the muster was over and we were gonna have a big lunch at the place where we'd originally gathered. We were breaking down camp and here comes a border chopper and he flies over the whole line and he dips his wings as he flew, saluting us as we left. I thought that was great.

Howard's experience was shared by other MCC members who also received gestures of thanks from the Border Patrol agents that they encountered in the field. MCC members explained that the Border Patrol were grateful because MCC operations allowed the Border Patrol to concentrate its efforts in particular areas along the border. "They're grateful for the help," one member said. "We work very well together. And it gives them when they have such a big area they know where we're at [and] we'll coordinate with them and work very closely." Another member said, "We hear from the Border Patrol. We hear them say things like were glad you're here because we don't have to be here." These experiences supported MCC beliefs about their purpose as a "force multiplier" for law enforcement agencies.

Most MCC members expressed that they had nothing but positive interactions with Border Patrol agents. They pointed to these experiences as proof of their effectiveness. "We have an impact I believe it because we're known. The Border Patrol accepts us and likes our group and they like us. As far as the other [minuteman groups] go, I don't know how they feel about them, but we've had nothing but good vibes about our group and us." For the MCC proof of their impact was measured largely by their belief that the Border Patrol appreciated the Minutemen.

The Border Patrol seems to appreciate us. When we went out and talk to ‘em, they were, “oh yeah Smith Valley that would be a good place we could use some extra eyes there. We really could use some extra eyes,” that’s what the guy told us. He was nice. He’s been around a bit too. So they know us we’ve made a name for ourselves. They know who we are. They have no problem with us. If they don’t want us in an area because there’s a special ops of some kind going, they’ll let us know. “Why don’t you guys go farther south or farther west or something,” you know. So that’s why we always call in when we go in. I would say we’ve made an impact and I think we can continue to do so. . . . It’s not a very big one, but we’ve done an impact here. I think we have.

Though it did not take place often, when Border Patrol agents instructed the Minutemen to focus on a particular stretch of the border, or to stay away from another, MCC members interpreted such actions as further proof of the positive relationship that they were forging with the Border Patrol, and as further signal of the MCC’s success.

MCC members believed that the Border Patrol viewed them as equals. One member who described his experiences with the Border Patrol as “all positive” briefly described an interaction with a Border Patrol agent that he believed expressed the positive relationship between the Border Patrol and the MCC.

A guy walked up to me one time on the railroad tracks and so I had him sit down and I called the Border Patrolman. He acted as if I was one of him when he came up he spoke to me asked me what happened, which I’m used to in law enforcement. In other words you interact with other departments. I always felt that they considered us equal. And I think they show a lot of respect for our group—[MCC] and now Border Patrol Auxiliary. I absolutely feel that they think that we’re doing some good. And that’s good and that’s a good feeling.

MCC members believed that they were engaged in a shared struggle at the border. When Border Patrol agents treated them as “equals” or with respect, they believed that they were having a positive impact on the border.

However, MCC volunteers acknowledged that there were times when this relationship broke down, when the Border Patrol acted in ways that highlighted the

differences between the Minutemen and the Border Patrol rather than their similarities. How did the Minutemen make sense of these experiences? Did it jeopardize their relationship? Did it discourage or embolden the Minutemen?

### Shakedown

In April 2009 a series of events took place that challenged the MCC's understanding of their relationship with the Border Patrol. April began as a slow month. The opening weekend of the muster attracted fewer numbers than had arrived at the same time the year before. A year earlier, around 30 members showed up to MCC musters on the weekends. During the week, volunteers numbered from just under ten to the teens. In April 2009 volunteers came and went from weekend to weekend. Their numbers peaked near twenty-five, and dwindled toward the middle of the month when, for two days, I was one of two people at camp. To complicate matters the weather was extremely poor. Temperatures at night dropped below forty degrees with a wind chill below freezing making extravehicular operations nearly impossible. Tara, who was leading operations during the week, called the campo Minutemen who told her that the border was dead.

In mid-April, only three MCC volunteers remained in camp: Margie, Phil, and Tara. Given our small numbers, all operations were suspended for the day, and we were given the day off. One of the members drove out to a neighboring town to get some materials from a hardware store. Another member stayed in camp to answer the phones and listen in on the radio, while Tara drove out to the border with a pair of journalists who were doing a story on the radio. Tara was dressed in a green BPAUX polo and khaki pants. She carried a small backpack and a pistol at her side, and stowed a hunting rifle in

the back of the car. She and the journalists left for the border prior to noon and returned around four o'clock in the afternoon.

While Tara was gone, two MCC volunteers arrived in camp as did Margie and Phil bringing our total to six, including me. We had been sitting in the meeting room chatting when Tara burst into the room and immediately began telling what happened to her and her guests while they were at the border. Tara stood at the front of the room, pacing. Her breathing was heavy and she seemed very upset.

Tara explained that her trip to the border began innocently enough. On their way out to the border Tara and her two guests encountered a lone Border Patrol agent. In an unusual break in protocol, Tara had not called to inform the Border Patrol that she was going to be at the border conducting an interview. When she drove by the Border Patrol agent, she informed him that they were going to the border to record an interview. The Border Patrol had no objection and allowed them to proceed to their destination. As they set up and began recording and taking pictures, four Border Patrol trucks and a Border Patrol supervisor in an unmarked car swooped in and surrounded them. Tara was certain that one of the agents was the same one she had spoken to earlier.

At first she was nonplussed. When the Supervisor approached her and her party and asked to see their IDs, Tara calmly explained that she was a member of the Border Patrol Auxiliary and they were there conducting an interview. The supervisor replied that he didn't care and again demanded their identification. Tara showed them her driver's license and her Minuteman badge and the journalists handed over their own. She informed them that she had forgotten to call and inform the station supervisor that they



would be at the border conducting an interview. The Supervisor called in the IDs and asked questions about what they were doing at the border.

“They shook us down,” Tara exclaimed. “I felt like I was wearing booties and speaking Spanish.” Perhaps this was just a photo op, someone suggested. The Border Patrol didn’t allow themselves to be photographed, Tara responded.

Immediately after the Border Patrol left, Tara called the leader of another local Minuteman organization that often operates near campo. She asked him if they too were having trouble with the Border Patrol. He told her that they were not having any problems. In fact, he told her, they had instructed him to focus his attention on a particular stretch of the border.

The next day we learned that, in fact, other minutemen had had similar experiences. The leader of the Mountain Minutemen, whom Tara had phoned the day before, came to Camp Vigilance along with two other members of his organization. The two men were in their early twenties. They each wore uneven beards, baseball caps, camouflage cargo pants, and Mountain Minutemen T-shirts. They introduced themselves by the radio handles that Mountain Minutemen use when communicating with one another. “Portholes” and “Hunter” also described a tense encounter with local Border Patrol. The same day that Tara was escorting the film crew to the border, two Border Patrol agents stopped “Portholes” and “Hunter.”. The two were driving a tan sedan along the border road when the two agents ordered them to exit the vehicle. As they exited, the agents pressed them face down onto the hood of their car and instructed them to put their hands behind their head. As the agents waited for a check on the Minutemen’s identification, the agents kept a hand on their holstered guns. According to “Portholes”

and “Hunter” the ordeal lasted almost an hour. As the interaction came to a close, one of the Border Patrol agents explained that they had received reports that a white supremacist organization was operating in the area.

On April 12, 2009, just days before Tara and the two Mountain Minutemen had their encounters with Border Patrol, Roger Hedgecock, a conservative radio host, blogger, and columnist for Worldnet Daily, published a leaked Homeland Security document that warned against the potential rise of “right-wing extremism.” The report, which was sent to state and federal law enforcement agencies cautioned that poor economic conditions, political change, most notably the election of an African-American president, and fear that a Democratic majority in congress would institute gun restrictions, and military demobilization may result in an outgrowth of right-wing violence (U.S. Department of Homeland Security 2009).

At first, the Minutemen did not know what to make of the document. One Minuteman volunteer asked me to read the document and tell him my opinion of the document. He was particularly concerned with what he said was an attack on the Minutemen. I read through the document. Indeed, the report said that rightwing groups “adopted the immigration issue as a call to action, rallying point, and recruiting tool.” The report identified militias and white supremacist organizations specifically as those most likely to utilize violence. I therefore told the Minuteman volunteer that I did not think the report was talking about him or his fellow Minutemen.

The next day, Tara mentioned the report specifically when trying to make sense of what she experienced the previous day. Many members seemed to agree with her that the Minutemen may be coming under increased scrutiny. The conservative media were also

decrying the report as an attack on all conservatives. Michelle Malkin (2009), for example called it a DHS “hit job” on all conservatives.

I did a little research and learned that DHS had released a similar report in 2007 on left-wing extremism. I told one member that the report had focused on groups like eco-terrorists. “Yeah, well, they’re really crazy,” she said.

Fear about the government cracking down on the Minutemen became so pervasive that some members began to question their interactions with the Border Patrol. One member recalled that earlier in the day he flagged down a Border Patrol agent as he drove by the front gate of the Camp Vigilance property. They briefly exchanged hellos and the Border Patrol agent drove off. Perhaps, he wondered aloud, the agent was driving by to count how many people were in camp and to record any other information he could about the Minutemen.

Another member told how a fellow Minutemen found a California Highway Patrol officer at one of their operation sites far away from any highway. Another said that a couple of Minutemen were “hassled” by the police.

These combined stories seemed to describe a disturbing shift in relations between the Minutemen and local law enforcement. Long had the Minutemen lauded their relationship with the “boots on the ground” Border Patrol agents. For many of the Minutemen, Tara’s experience as well as other seemed to reveal that they were the ones under surveillance now, instead of the “illegals.”

Tara and her Minutemen companions viewed this shift in the terms that made sense to them; they expressed concerns of heightened government surveillance through the same good guy/bad guy logic that helped them make sense of undocumented

migration. The actions of the federal government and the Border Patrol made Tara and her MCC compatriots feel like the outsiders. Tara believed that she was treated like a lawbreaker when she was there to help enforce the law.

A year later, I asked Tara about her experience that day and asked her to talk about any other negative experiences that she had with Border Patrol agents. She described her experiences as largely positive, but she admitted that she had some negative experiences too.

Right after the murder (of Agent Robert Rosas) I had . . . some alphabet agency put their brights in my eyes.<sup>16</sup> I've been called in—my plates and my ID more times than I know what, you know. But I always clear up. But of course it's a tense situation. I've been shaken down 'cause I was with a [crew of journalists]. They don't like the media. That's something from their hierarchy that came down. I don't know. I'm just always polite. I realize that, you know, cooperate with them and there's no lasting effect. It's "OK, we got you cleared." Then we're fine. Until they're satisfied. And for some reason, it could be something I don't even know about there've been arms [or] the military coming over again from Mexico, which they do. You know I've had guys that I know out in the field, BP agents, come up [to me and say] we've gotta keep your eyes open. We got a vehicle driving around here that came over [the border]. We're looking for it have you seen it. Asking me to identify everyone I know that's out there, you know. We share intel. . . . There's gonna be tension and you just have to understand that. And once everything's cleared up the tension is eased somewhat. It helps the situation.

A year after the incident, Tara's perspective had changed. Whereas her initial response was angry and indignant, a year later she blamed the presence of the media for the Border Patrol's reaction. She did not express any feelings of resentment toward the Border Patrol, or the agents that "shook her down." On the contrary, she seemed to describe the events as a logical outcome of the deteriorating conditions on the border. Instead, she

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<sup>16</sup> Agent Robert Wimer Rosas, Jr. was shot and killed on July 23, 2009 near campo, California. According to news reports, Agent Rosas was killed by a group of Mexican nationals who wished to rob a Border Patrol agent. Marcos Rodriguez-Perez, Emilo Samyn Gonzales-Arenas, José Juan Chacón-Morales, José Luis Ramirez-Dorantes, and Christian Daniel Castro-Alvarez were indicted on multiple charges, including murder. As of this writing, only Castro-Alvarez has been convicted.

described a largely cooperative relationship that drew on the same themes of equality and shared struggle that other MCC members had expressed.

She also hinted that the events may have transpired because of a directive from above, thus acquitting the “boots on the ground” agents of any malintent. In so doing, Tara expressed a widespread belief among the Minutemen that Border Patrol field agents would go to the same lengths to control the border as the Minutemen if only their leaders and politicians in Washington would let them. “It’s common knowledge that the hierarchy of government don’t have the stomach or the will and they’re going through the motions,” said one MCC member. Another member explained that government representatives that were “closer to the Beltway” did not appreciate the Minutemen, instead they viewed the Minutemen as “part of the unmanageable hoard of hoi polloi that need to be managed and herded.” On the other hand, “the troops in the field, I know that they . . . do appreciate us.” Another member believed that the federal government actively prevented field agents from effectively doing their job. In his opinion the MCC were needed because “the government is not allowing their people to do (their jobs). . . . I know if you don’t put men in the sector then you’re saying it’s OK to go through that sector. And I think the government in their own way does that. That’s what I believe. I don’t trust the government to run anything.”

Over time, the concerns that the Minutemen expressed immediately after the DHS report was leaked, eased. Though MCC members continued to express distrust of the government, and continued to accuse it of willfully ignoring undocumented immigration and border security, they did not continue to express concerns of being unfairly targeted

by the government. The tensions did not ease on their own accord, however. MCC leaders took proactive steps to improve their relationship with the Border Patrol

### BPAUX and Radicalization as Professionalization

To address the challenges that the events of April 2009 posed, MCC leadership initiated a series of interventions—some that they had already been performing, and others that they developed—to improve their relationship with the Border Patrol and its hierarchy. The first thing that MCC leaders did was to reach out to local Border Patrol leaders and schedule regular meetings. The purpose of the meetings was to share information and to open a dialogue between the MCC and the Border Patrol. The second thing that MCC leaders did was to step away from the Minuteman “brand” and begin expanding the Border Patrol Auxiliary brand. In this section, I describe the reasons that MCC leaders gave for initiating the Border Patrol Auxiliary and their reasons for emphasizing BPAUX as they distanced their efforts from the Minuteman moniker. Individuals who were members of both the MCC and BPAUX emphasized the differences between the two organizations as a way to counter the stigma associated with the Minuteman brand. Specifically, BPAUX was designed to 1) allow the Border Patrol greater freedom to work with the Minutemen; 2) to distance BPAUX and its members from accusations of racism and radicalism; and 3) to increase the Minutemen’s ability to influence official border security efforts.

In January 2008, the Border Patrol Auxiliary (BPAUX) announced a national membership drive. The Border Patrol Auxiliary was formed by the leaders of the MCC to

overcome the negative stigma attached to the Minuteman moniker and ease relations with the Border Patrol and media.

BPAUX organizers set ambitious goals that would shift the dialogue about border security to make the issue truly about homeland security. Ken Dreger, co-founder of BPAUX stated in the organization's press release: "We wanted to find a way that Citizen Watch Groups [sic] could become properly trained in border watch activities and more actively involved in the entire homeland security process." To that end, BPAUX sought to expand their efforts to include marine operations, air patrols, cyber-watch operations, disaster relief efforts, and "civil defense" training. They also sought to open chapters throughout the United States.<sup>17</sup>

Organizers billed BPAUX as a "non-political force-multiplier" for border law enforcement organizations. In his weekly podcast, Carl Braun described the purpose of BPAUX.

[BPAUX] was formed to make America's communities safer by providing private security at no cost to the resident and by helping the Border Patrol do its jobs better. And you'd recognize our people out in the field because they wear uniforms that distinguish Border Patrol Auxiliarists from other citizen efforts. And our rank mirrors that of the Border Patrol itself so BP themselves know when they're working with someone who has a lot of experience. Many of our members have several years and thousands of hours in the field and most are current or former Border Patrol agents, law enforcement officers, we've got folks in the military, former military, Coast Guard Auxiliary, and the ordinary everyday Americans...Our SOP, or Standard Operating Procedures, are strict. We do not pursue this mission from a political standpoint; we are non-political. We're not anti-anything; we are pro-border-security and pro-security of our communities. And because of this—and this is why we started this in the first place—because of this there is no political third rail that the Border Patrol or any other law

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<sup>17</sup> Other than the main California chapter, BPAUX also formed chapters in Arizona and Puerto Rico. From discussions with BPAUX leadership I gleaned that the Puerto Rico chapter consisted primarily of law enforcement officers who functioned mainly as an educational organization. Photos posted on the BPAUX website depict Puerto Rican BPAUX members in a classroom setting. The Arizona chapter conducted one operation near Tucson. Citing safety reasons, BPAUX leadership do not discuss specific operations.

enforcement agency has to touch, alright. It is something—an organization—that the Border Patrol can work with. And that's very important. (Braun 2008)

BPAUX was designed to allow Minuteman volunteers an opportunity to form a closer working relationship with law enforcement. BPAUX organizers believed that by donning uniforms, adopting more professional conduct, and avoiding overt political expressions such as protests, lobbying, etc., the Border Patrol would be more likely to work with BPAUX in a more routine and, perhaps eventually, in a more official capacity.

BPAUX was not designed to replace the Minutemen nor did it result in a complete separation from the MCC. Instead, BPAUX operates parallel to the MCC. All of its members are also members of the MCC, although not all MCC members are part of BPAUX. The two groups also share Camp Vigilance as a base of operations. Unlike members of the MCC, BPAUX members wear khaki uniforms that contain a cloth badge over the left breast pocket. Unlike their MCC brethren, BPAUX members may also carry assault rifles and shotguns when out on patrol. However, when the two groups muster together, BPAUX members typically forego their uniforms and long arms and conduct operations as members of the MCC. Though BPAUX musters on different weekends than the MCC most months, during the months of April and October, the MCC and BPAUX muster together. Though the leadership of the MCC (which shares much of the same leadership with BPAUX) goes to great lengths to maintain the appearance of difference to outsiders, the distinction is often blurred.

In many ways, the members and leaders of both groups use BPAUX to legitimize the activities of the Minutemen. Once BPAUX became official, MCC leaders began conducting interviews with the press exclusively in their BPAUX regalia. Even the owner



of the property on which Camp Vigilance is located began referring to the MCC as BPAUX to curious campers who were staying at his resort.

Though the differences between the MCC and BPAUX appear to be largely cosmetic, there are two specific differences that set BPAUX and MCC apart. The first was BPAUX's use of uniforms. The second was the authorization of long arm use during BPAUX operations

During the first musters in California and Arizona, Minuteman organizers discouraged members from wearing full camouflage. The MCC told its members that no one could go out on operations in full camouflage because the press would equate that with militias, and because the National Guard instructed MCC leaders that anyone wearing full camouflage would be considered hostile.

Uniforms give BPAUX operations an aura of professionalism that MCC operations lack. This was a major appeal to some members who felt like the MCC was an organization whose volunteers were too lax and disorganized. One member who, prior to learning about BPAUX, was seriously considering leaving the MCC, became rejuvenated when he joined BPAUX. For him, it was the professionalism that BPAUX promised, that attracted him.

I said, 'Yeah, that's what I want: uniforms and procedures, rules and regulations.' That's me, you see. But it's not everybody. And some people resent it and some people say 'so what? He wants to wear sneakers with his uniform. So what?' To me it diminishes it. It diminishes the way it looks to other people. It diminishes the way it looks to me.

The uniform also makes BPAUX seem more like the Border Patrol. Indeed, it is not uncommon for BPAUX members to be confused with government agents. In addition to wearing badges on their uniforms, BPAUX leaders appropriate the same insignias of rank

that the Border Patrol use. According to one member of BPAUX's leadership, a Border Patrol agent saw his collar insignia pin and immediately began referring to him as "sir." The BPAUX member said that it was "cool" that the BP agent treated him like a supervisor. Others have received offers of free coffee at local cafés because they are wearing the uniform. BPAUX does not don the uniform so that people will confuse them with Border Patrol agents, but they capitalize on the advantages that it offers, primarily by placing them on more equal footing with their official counterparts.

For BPAUX members and organizers, wearing uniforms and refraining from participating in overt political protest also granted the minuteman movement more legitimacy within the media. One member of BPAUX's leadership group told me in an interview conducted less than a year before the national MCDC disbanded that he believed its days were numbers. He believed that "people are going to wanna go to the next level. Members, volunteers, are gonna wanna take this cause to the next level and are gonna be hindered from doing so with the current model that is being used by MCDC."

"What is that next level," I asked.

I think a more mainstream. I think we're still fighting this battle with the press. The press paints us typically as a bunch of white, right-wing extremist, xenophobic, racists. And I don't know that under [MCDC President] Carmen Mercer's guidance we'll be able to change that. [The MCDC] will always be a political group. It will always have challenges with the media and finding acceptance in the press as well as being delivered to the masses in more of a neutral form [that allows] the masses to make a decision on their own based on facts and empiricism and critical thinking and reason... So they typically paint us with a very broad brush and I don't think that's gonna change. And I think that's why I'm getting more involved with the Border Patrol Auxiliary. Yes, some of the, if not most of the, members of the Border Patrol Auxiliary have come from the minuteman movement, and I don't mean just MCDC, but also Minuteman Project and other local border watch groups. And I think because we want to take

this to the next level to mainstream acceptance. I mean we look at our quote, unquote “enemies” in the cause such as a La Raza, or a MEChA, or a MALDEF and how they have received mainstream acceptance and yet they have thoroughly radicalized their agenda...so...yes I do believe “Minuteman” is a household term but it comes along with a lot of baggage and negative connotations. Whereas a La Raza has more of a neutral connotation associated with it. And so anyway I think that’s why a lot of us are leaning more towards a BPAUX organization to take this to greater acceptance.

According to David, the overtly political nature of the MCDC was to blame for its diminishing significance on the national scale. Instead, focusing exclusively on border security efforts and on popular education would make the minuteman movement more palatable to a broader segment of the news media and to the public. In others words to access the media more legitimately and gain influence over the public, BPAUX would have to adopt tactics more *like* the Border Patrol’s. Wearing a plain khaki uniform complete with badge and cap made BPAUX appear to be more like official law enforcement agencies, and less like the weekend warrior stereotype that plagued the minutemen. Moreover, BPAUX had to appear to be an organization that limited its activity to supporting the government instead of protest, political advocacy, and the like. BPAUX members thus described the new organization as a “non-political” organization. They explained that their purpose was solely to support the Border Patrol. As one member explained to me, if the government said to us, we’re letting everyone in except redheads, then we would support that.

However, as David’s comments reveal, members viewed BPAUX as integrally connected to the minuteman movement. There was a practical reason for this. The minuteman movement was comprised of hundreds of organizations, and the MCC could call on a thousands-strong membership to participate in musters and donate time and

money to help pay for Camp Vigilance. Without the MCC, BPAUX, whose membership base is smaller, would be unable to afford to pay for Camp Vigilance's lease. Just how apolitical could BPAUX be given its inseparable connection to the MCC?

Their close relationship, also allowed current and potential members to choose between different levels of participation. Those who sought a more exciting and more disciplined organization could seek out BPAUX. For those who wanted a more informal experience, they could continue with the MCC. It also allowed MCC leaders a way to articulate their aims as educational rather than political.

The ambivalent feelings that MCC members felt towards the government were shared by BPAUX members. Some BPAUX leaders believed that the ultimate goal of the organization should be to make the relationship between BPAUX and the Border Patrol more official. They referenced the Coast Guard Auxiliary and the Civil Air Patrol as examples of official auxiliaries that were backed by state agencies.<sup>18</sup>

Others expressed opposition or ambivalence about this idea. David West believed that BPAUX members would never agree to becoming an official auxiliary of the Border Patrol. Tara said that she would welcome an official partnership between BPAUX and the Border Patrol, but only "if it were in the purest sense." I asked her what she meant.

Well I think a lot of the federal agencies are enablers in this situation. To me that doesn't solve the problem. And an agency that doesn't have the political will or desire or who looks at someone not breaking laws but a U.S. citizen that respects

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<sup>18</sup> The Coast Guard Auxiliary is a volunteer program run by the U.S. Coast Guard. Formed during World War II, the Coast Guard Auxiliary was first formed to assist in offshore patrols in search of Japanese warships. Today, the Coast Guard Auxiliary conducts vessel safety inspections and harbor patrols, provides safe boating courses, and aids in search and rescue efforts. The Civil Air Patrol is a volunteer program run by the United States Air Force. The Civil Air Patrol was also established during World War II to aid in the anti-war effort. Today, the Civil Air Patrol participates in variety of operations such as disaster relief efforts, search and rescue, humanitarian aid, counterdrug and Air Force support operations.

the constitution as the bad guy no I wouldn't want to work with them. Because what are you doing you know? But I would like to see [it].

MCC/BPAUX members like Tara expressed concerns that the government would coopt their efforts. By becoming an official auxiliary, BPAUX might be subject to the same restrictions that they believed Border Patrol agents were subjected to.

BPAUX offered something else that the MCC could not provide. BPAUX gave members the opportunity to purchase and carry more aggressive weaponry. The use of long arms was the second radical departure that BPAUX made from its minuteman predecessors.

The original MCDC SOP (which was what the MCC used) encouraged volunteers to carry handguns at MCDC musters and during operations primarily as a way to promote the media spectacle. A Center for New Community (2005) report quotes a Minuteman volunteer who pointed to his holstered gun and stated, “This helped us get this press coverage. That’s the reason why we’re here, not to use them,” and ““Oh, men with guns!’ That’s much better than, ‘Oh, men with walkie-talkies—they might throw them!’” In 2006, the SOP was changed, and stated only that members *may* bring guns with them, but must keep them holstered at all times.

The idea is for your sidearm to remain holstered for the duration of your visit. There will be absolutely no need to ever remove your firearm from its holster—not for cleaning, not for show-and-tell, not for any reason. By never removing the firearm from the holster, never keeping it chambered and always keeping the safety on and keeping your hands away from it, unless you have to defend your very own life, and then only within the rules of the law, according to each State you are working in, there can be no accidents. End of discussion. Remove the firearm from the holster for any other reason, and your group members will likely send you on your way back home. (Minuteman Civil Defense Corps 2005)

I asked an MCC spokesperson about this change back in October 2006. He confirmed that the initial policy openly encouraged members to carry guns at all border patrol activities and remained the standing policy despite the fact that it was not publicized in the 2006 calls to muster. He also explained that volunteers were restricted to carrying sidearms that must remain holstered at all times, only to be removed in case of immediate threat. He also explained that volunteers could bring long-arms (rifles and shotguns) with them to Minuteman musters and on operations but that they must remain in their vehicles at all times except in the case of immediate threat.

The MCDC and MCC's strict gun regulations differentiated them from a number of other civilian border security organizations which had no such restrictions. Indeed, as one member informed me, many volunteers left the MCC precisely because of the restrictions on assault rifles. However, for those who stayed with the MCC, the gun regulations were one of the ways that they distinguished the MCC from other local civilian border patrol organizations. One member referred to another local civilian border patrol organization as "a bunch of yahoos." He continued, "I think anybody that runs around in camouflage and rifles and excessive weaponry, they may have the same purpose in mind but I don't agree with them." The MCC on the whole, as well as individual members, often tried to distinguish themselves from other civilian border security groups in this way.

In addition to liberalizing their gun regulations for BPAUX members, the MCC and BPAUX also began to sponsor tactical handgun and assault rifle trainings. They referred to the assault rifle trainings as "sniper school." The hand gun training taught participants how to reload quickly and how to fight in close quarters as a team. The

“sniper school” helped participants improve their marksmanship in addition to teaching them skills such as how to quickly switch from rifles to pistols in a combat situation. In short, the new trainings offered military training. All members of the MCC and BPAUX were free to sign up for the trainings for a nominal fee.

BPAUX members justified the use of aggressive weaponry because they believed that *cartelistas* would view uniformed BPAUX members as “combatants.”

David West reasoned that if “a drug cartel were to shoot me for instance—I’m just a civilian, a weekend warrior with you know, three young kids and a wife—goes down to the border to just simply contribute to the safety and security of the country and he gets assassinated...I think you’d have every Billy Bob redneck out of Mississippi and Georgia running down to the border with their automatic and semi-automatic weapons and opening up on anything that moves.” The killing of a BPAUX member, David explained would not likely elicit the same response.

If a BPAUX member is fired upon from lets say a drug cartel, uh shooter, I think it’s gonna be viewed completely differently. I think their gonna be looked upon as almost ...boy see I need to be very careful in how I say this...but professional um, not mercenaries, but um combatants—you know security guards lets say. They’re in uniform, they look professional, they’re there on an organized professional mission.

Wearing uniforms and using more aggressive weaponry made BPAUX appear to be more professional, but it also made BPAUX more dangerous. In his book *Warrior Dreams* James Gibson (1994) explains how mastering long arms increases the users’ capacity to kill.

In mastering combat arms of longer range, the warrior prepares to kill more and more people. And face-to-face combat disappears as the ranges increase; the warrior can enforce his deadly will upon victims before they have a chance to

react. Indeed, at the longer ranges, the warrior is often not responding to a threat against himself, he is on the attack” (Gibson 1994:89).

Carrying long arms and becoming “combatants” allowed MCC members to confront the (perceived) threat of drug trafficking and “illegal” immigration without being directly “confrontational.” Like Gibson’s “warrior” BPAUX members placed themselves on the attack. As Gibson also notes, “Combat weapons...are not only a means of aggressive self-expansion; they also function as body armor” (Gibson 1994:89). BPAUX’s use of long arms was justified as a necessary measure to protect against the violence that they were likely to experience. However, BPAUX members ignored the ways that they were responsible for escalating the potential for violence.

Not everyone agreed that allowing the use of long arms was a good idea. Russell advocated the use of shotguns as a “defensive” weapon, but did not carry a rifle.

I don’t call a long arm a rifle. I call a long arm a shotgun. A shotgun is a defensive weapon. A rifle is an offensive weapon. You reach out and touch somebody a distance away. No I could never carry a long arm. I own a shotgun and the shotgun I own I brought down here. And I carry it at night time when I’m here because if you’re in an altercation it’s not gonna be at a distance, it’s gonna be at a close range. And I don’t know how I would react. I always said when I was a cop someone is gonna kill me before I would kill them. Because I don’t think I could be that aggressive. So no, not rifles. We have guys that have rifles.

Russell acknowledged that rifles are primarily offensive weapons. Though he did not use one, he also acknowledged that others did, and did not issue an objection.

That April, as the muster wound down a group of Minutemen were sitting around the grotto, drinking beers and talking about airplanes and fighters.<sup>19</sup> Jerry Eaton, a

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<sup>19</sup> As with guns, the MCC had relatively strong prohibitions against drinking alcohol and participating in operations. Drinking in camp, though not prohibited, was heavily regulated and thus rare. This was only one of two times when I witnessed MCC members consuming alcohol and the only time that I witnessed members drinking together. For example, in one instance, a new MCC volunteer opened a can of beer after dinner. Another members approached him and suggested to him that drinking was frowned upon and was



hulking man who stood over six feet tall and possessed an expansive gut, walked up to us and stood in front of the waterfall. One of the MCC volunteers was leaving early, he informed us. When someone asked why, Jerry would not say. After a brief interlude, the grotto quieted as Jerry said that he had to get something off his chest.

In July the MCC and BPAUX were hosting “Operation Secure America now,” a Fourth of July celebration at Camp Vigilance. Former Colorado Congressman Tom Tancredo was going to be the keynote speaker. Tancredo, Jerry explained, had been “attacked” recently while giving a talk at a North Carolina University.<sup>20</sup> BPAUX was busy coordinating security for the event to make sure a similar incident did not take place during the Fourth of July event. One of the members of BPAUX wanted to carry his rifle around Camp Vigilance during the event as a security measure, Jerry said. This is what happens when people who are not in law enforcement get involved in event security, he complained. Jerry said that he had plans to bring his shotgun down for the event, but he believed it and all other shotguns or rifles should remain locked away. The MCC member that left early also objected to BPAUX members carrying their shotguns and rifles during what was supposed to be a family event. Reason apparently prevailed as BPAUX carried only their sidearms during Operation Secure America Now. However, the dispute signaled that at least some members of the MCC (and BPAUX) were not convinced that easing weapon restrictions was a good idea.

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certainly not allowed if he was going to go out on ops that night. The new members replied that he did not know about the rules, that he typically only has a beer with dinner, and that he would have no problem refraining for the rest of the weekend.

<sup>20</sup> Tancredo’s speech at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill was cut short when protesters placed a sign in front of him as he spoke and another unknown person threw a brick against the window of the room in which Tancredo was speaking (Richardson 2009).

Nevertheless, by 2009 the MCC was working closer than ever with other Minuteman groups. BPAUX was allowing its members to carry assault rifles and shotguns, and was conducting a variety of operations, such as operations at the coast, that differed dramatically from its previous efforts.

### Decline

The creation of the Border Patrol Auxiliary occurred at a time when MCC members witnessed fewer individuals attempting to cross the border clandestinely. According to Border Patrol apprehension statistics, apprehensions increased in the San Diego sector, which includes the areas in which the MCC conducts their border operations, from over 142,000 in 2006 to 162,392 in 2008. Those numbers dropped to 118,712 in 2009 and fell to 68,565 in 2010 (U.S. Department of Homeland Security 2010). In 2004, the last year in which station by station apprehension statistics were published, apprehensions in east San Diego far outpaced apprehensions near the city of San Diego (Haddal, Kim, and Garcia 2009).<sup>21</sup> Given broader trends of cross border traffic it is safe to assume that east San Diego county continues to experience a high proportion of cross border traffic in the San Diego sector, but at dramatically lower levels than in previous years.

By 2009, MCC members claimed to have virtually “shut down” the stretch of border near Camp Vigilance. The head of BPAUX shared with MCC and BPAUX members an email that was sent to him by a Border Patrol supervisor. David West described the contents to me.

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<sup>21</sup> The Border Patrol no longer gives station by station apprehension statistics. An agent that I spoke with explained that they do not want drug and human smugglers to know where the Border Patrol has been the most successful in apprehending clandestine border crossers.

One of the heads of the Border Patrol agencies—I won't mention his name for his safety and political stability, so . . . there are no negative ramifications on his part—he wrote a letter which [Name] brought to the group last October saying that uh he attributes almost complete shutting down of our sector to us. Yes there were increased Border Patrol agents there because of Officer Rosas assassination which also played a key role into minimizing the human and drug trafficking taking place within our sector, but also uh this chief of this Border Patrol sector wanted to note in writing that we played a key role in affecting the arrest of you know all that we did and helping to affectively shut the border down.

Though MCC members expressed pride in their apparent success in slowing cross border traffic, they also expressed concern for what that would mean for the MCC as an organization. Howard believed that they were momentarily successful, but that there was still much left for the Minutemen to do.

Because the incursions recently have dropped you could argue, at least in the segments that we're normally accustomed to patrol, you could say that well maybe we're done here and we should just close up shop. There are other segments however where there is more activity. In fact we were just talking about this last night, 'cause I expect to be bringing two new comers in this month. And I would hate for them to come in when the battle is already over, at least here. I don't want to bring them down here for a fire drill. . . . I guess you could say, you know, in one sense we may have painted ourselves into a corner. And if we leave does it look like we're abandoning. I'm concerned about that. If we should say, "well, it looks like we won, at least for here. Border patrol is staffed up. The traffic seems to be going elsewhere. The druggers are growing their pot in the Sierra. So maybe now is the time to move our forces." And we are thinking about different kinds of deployments. Where there is more traffic. I would not like to see us give this up simply because I would not like the psychological signal that that would send. I mean don't want to give any encouragement to La Raza.

I asked, "If you did so because, you know, "mission accomplished," would that be sending that signal?"

He replied, "Well, except that mission is not accomplished because even though they are not coming in here they are coming in elsewhere. They're coming across the damn checkpoints. They're coming in by La Jolla for Pete's sake. Coming in by San Clemente." Though the MCC had apparently achieved its goal of slowing clandestine

traffic, they still had not achieved their political goals: Congress was still considering amnesty. Though more Border Patrol agents were assigned to the border, more fences built, and fewer “illegals” were getting through, they still continued to cross, and Latino advocacy groups continued to enjoy mainstream acceptance.

David West framed it slightly differently than Howard. For David, the MCC’s mission was accomplished, but for BPAUX there was much left to do.

From a MCDC/[MCC] standpoint that organization is too small for this great a cause. Looking back at Chris Simcox’s mission and vision, I think he’s achieved mission accomplished. I mean, if you look at his background and what he—for all intents and purposes, he’s a media man and his goal was to educate the public, to bring this to the forefront of the mainstream press. And you know what, he’s succeeded hands down. I’d have to say almost single handedly. And so take a step back 35-38 years now. FAIR, CIS, these groups that have been around for a long time, NumbersUSA, they didn’t bring this topic into everyone’s household and make it a topic of discussion at the dinner table the way that Simcox did and to a far lesser degree . . . Jim Gilchrist. . . . But the goal of Simcox was to bring this to the national forefront as far as discussion and from a political standpoint and media standpoint and so you know what, kudos to him. I think their mission’s done. Their lifecycle is nearing its end.

Moreover, the MCC found it difficult to attract new members to the organization and was having trouble getting its members to participate in its musters. “There used to be 50 people show up at a muster, “ one member said. “I mean regularly. It was fun. We looked forward to it. I mean now its like if we can get together a few people. You’ve seen it. We made you go out just to fill the car.”

As cross border traffic diminished and the number of MCC volunteers attending musters also decreased, the MCC increased its collaboration with other local groups. It became common to conduct joint operations with other civilian border patrol organizations that operated in the area. The MCC officially joined forces with these organizations that, for the most part, lacked coordinated leadership, an official base of

operations, and that had no restrictions on what type of weapons they might use on their patrols. They did not adhere to any formal SOP either. One member, who often works closely with other Minuteman organization agreed that they were more loosely organized but that did not mean that they were more dangerous. “You’re talking about people that are current or retired law enforcement and military. They don’t need to be micro managed. That’s the difference. So, not to give the impression that just because they’re not a big [MCC] and have a camp and a Comm. Center and all that, that its loosey goosey. People [are] as serious as a heart attack but know their jobs.”

BPAUX represented an attempt to attract new members and retain old ones. It provided something for everyone. For the Minuteman who just wanted to sit in their car at the border, they could still continue to do so as members of the MCC. For the Minuteman who wanted to be more active, trek through the hills, ride their ATV, and play cat and mouse with Mexicans, BPAUX provided that also. And for the gun enthusiast, BPAUX allowed members to bring their assault rifles and their shotguns, and it provided them with opportunities to use them.

### Conclusion

In this chapter I have tried to describe the complicated relationship between the Minutemen and the state. MCC members described their interactions with Border Patrol agents as largely positive. They explained that not only were Border Patrol agents friendly, they often treated MCC members as equals. When members donned the BPAUX uniform that feeling was intensified. Whether they were operating as the MCC or as BPAUX, volunteers described a largely cooperative relationship. At times, Border

Patrol agents would give MCC volunteers directions. At others they largely ignored the MCC. And in rare instances they treated MCC volunteers with suspicion and distrust. When Tara was “shook down” the Border Patrol made her feel like she was no different than a migrant despite participating in and wearing garb that would identify her as a super citizen/patriot

The outlaw image that at times limits the Minutemen’s ability to create alliances with the state, is a carefully crafted image. From the outset, the Minutemen have navigated a narrow line between opposition to and support of the state. The Minutemen at once use the image of the Minutemen as outlaw, criminal, outcast, vigilante, as a way to motivate and mobilize and create group solidarity even as they seek to portray themselves as a law abiding and harmless force multiplier for the government. Though they participate in the construction of this image, they also objected to being described as radical extremists.

The way that the MCC carefully polices their public image, particular vis-à-vis the Border Patrol, suggests that their audience is less the public than it is the state. While the Minutemen are engaged in very real border security activities that have (at least) some practical impacts on the movements of *some* border crossers, they use the movements of migrants through physical space as a way to negotiate power and influence over the state at the bureaucratic level as well as the national political level.

Within the context of a continued struggle to legitimize their activities in the eyes of the state, the events of April 2009, and the formation of BPAUX reveal how by aligning their actions more closely with those of the state, the Minutemen are able to successfully achieve their organizational goals. The Minutemen are not always able to

articulate or enact their privileged position as citizens vis-à-vis the state. What this research suggests is that it is not enough for the Minutemen to just be present at the border to successfully articulate and enact their identities and rights as (patriotic) citizens. Rather, the Minutemen must manage their actions in ways that better put them into positions to act *like* the state, even if they do not act *as* the state.

Without the state, the Minutemen would be unable to act. Not only does the state provide the ideological and tactical basis upon which the Minutemen model their own efforts (i.e. that border security is the most effective way of stemming undocumented immigration and that conducting border patrols is the most effective form of border security), but this practice is riddled with challenges. In addition to the myriad tactical challenges that the Minutemen face, they also must deal with their own contradictory relationship to the state. Driven in part by neoliberal ideologies that advocate against “big government,” the Minutemen are motivated and their morality is in part based upon a belief that they are doing a job that the government cannot or will not do.

Interestingly, the Minutemen do not gauge their success on their ability to stop undocumented immigrants. Operations that typically result in no sightings, or when clandestine border crossers are observed, no confirmation of apprehension, are gauged to be successful by the Border Patrol’s reaction to the actions of the Minutemen. The Minutemen are ultimately successful if the Border Patrol treats MCC volunteers with respect, as equals, and if the Border Patrol responds to MCC calls for aid. In short, the Minutemen attempt to act like the state as a means of receiving praise and support from the Border Patrol and other official state policing bodies.

This research suggests that it might be a case of overstatement to say, as Doty (2007) does, that the Minutemen are participating in state activities. And though I agree with Walsh (2008) that the Minutemen do seek to align with the coercive state apparatus, this process is incomplete, and in many ways contradicted by the Minutemen's desire to remain independent and free of governmental influence.

Instead, it might be better to consider that the Minutemen are still actively engaged in a struggle to define that relationship with the state. This unfolding relationship is at the heart of what the Minutemen do and how they gauge the relative effectiveness of their efforts. The members of the MCC (and BPAUX) define success not by their ability to stop individuals or drugs from crossing the border, but by how they are viewed by the Border Patrol, DHS, and Washington.



## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

In the introduction to *The Wages of Whiteness*, David Roediger (2007) recounts how rather than allow blacks to use the public swimming pool, the white citizens of Cairo, Illinois shut down the pool. As he became more conscious of the extent of white racism in Cairo, a young Roediger wondered “whether whites were ruining the town, as they had the swimming pool, in order to hold on to white supremacy” (2007:5).

Roediger’s work is a powerful account of the lengths that whites have gone to retain political and economic control at the expense of blacks and other people of color even when those efforts ultimately harmed white workers.

There is ample evidence to suggest that whites draw tremendous benefit from non-white immigration in general and undocumented immigration in particular (Lipsitz 2006:52). Nevertheless, the anti-immigrant impulse, of which the MCC is part, seeks to curb or end many if not all forms of immigration as a way of maintaining white supremacy in the United States. From the moment the men and women of the MCC first began to consider the problems that they associated with immigration, to the moment that they, as part of the MCC, engaged in civilian border patrols, they became participants in a power struggle to define the bounds of the nation.

Eric Wolf (1990) identifies four dimensions of power. The first dimension of power he calls personal power or potency (Wolf 1990:586). In Chapter Three, I describe

how MCC members complained about a changing world. They saw demographic, economic, and political changes taking place in their country, state, and communities. They described feeling powerless to resist or defend what they viewed as an out of control nation. These members felt victimized by the government, by powerful corporate interests, and by immigrants and immigrant advocates that they described as special interests.

Evoking racialized language to express their opposition to immigration reflected an attempt by MCC members to make sense and gain a sense of control over an out of control world. Talking about crime, terrorism, government dependence and the like, allowed MCC members to talk about race while disavowing racist intent. Such speech allowed the Minutemen to “speak on behalf of whiteness and its accumulated privileges and immunities, but rather than having to speak *as* whites, they present themselves as racially unmarked homeowners, citizens, and taxpayers whose preferred policies just happen to sustain white privilege and power” (Lipsitz 2011:35).

Not only did the MCC allow this type of activity, it actively courted it. Camp Vigilance became a place where MCC members could participate in conversations about race without being called racist or xenophobic. However, there remained a surreptitious element to belonging to the MCC that placed it and Camp Vigilance in between a public and private space. George Lipsitz (2006:51) argues that public initiatives to restrict the rights of immigrants provided opportunities for whites to publicly express their racial resentments and fantasies that they had previously kept hidden. Participating in MCC musters gave members the same opportunity to express their anxieties and fantasies openly and out loud, but only within the safe space that Camp Vigilance provided.

However, the concerns that MCC volunteers expressed did not distinguish them from others who shared their anti-immigration sentiments. Indeed, they drew on well-trod themes such as immigrants as poor, unhealthy, and prone to criminal behavior.

Kathleen Blee, in her fascinating oral history of Midwestern women of the Ku Klux Klan describes how the Klan did more than simply mirror the racism and xenophobia that already existed in the Midwest. Rather, the KKK “provided an organizational means to transform fears and resentments into political action” (Blee 2009:155) Similarly, the MCC provided its members with a means to transform their anxieties into political action that gained legitimacy precisely because of its resemblance to official state efforts. The MCC provided members with the ability to access the second dimension of power that Wolf describes: the power to impose one’s will on another. Here, the MCC was attempting to impose their will on a number of actors including migrants, Border Patrol agents, and politicians.

The MCC developed a relationship with the Border Patrol as a way of augmenting their ability to stop individuals from crossing into the United States without authorization. Moreover, by participating in border patrols that were optically similar to official tactics, the MCC sought to legitimize their place on the border, and to legitimize their political aims. However, as I discuss in the preceding chapter, without an official mandate to patrol the border, the Minutemen were beholden to the state to achieve their political aims. When the state was unresponsive or when it appeared to target the Minutemen, the MCC took steps to better manage its relationship with the state. In particular, the MCC began acting more like the state by adopting uniforms and more militarized tactics and training.

But there is a third dimension of power at play here, and that is what Wolf calls tactical or organizational power. Wolf describes this as the ability to “control the settings in which people may show forth their potentialities and interact with others” (1990:586). Feeling unable to effect change within their communities, MCC members projected the boundaries of their communities onto the boundaries of the nation. The border, including its dangers, became a stand in for home.

The transformation of Camp Vigilance into a comfortable base of operations represented a collective attempt to regain control, of the borderlands, and by extension, their communities and the nation. There was a sense that the usual efforts to protect white space from incursion by brown and black bodies, such as constructing gates and walls around their communities was no longer enough. Recall, for example Carl Braun who lived on a literal island, and who nonetheless expressed deep-seated anxieties about the threat that the war-zone like areas that surrounded his community posed to his idyllic life. Patrolling the borders became a logical approach to combat the potential dangers that polyglot dystopias represented.

The MCC also constructed fences out of barbed wire that extended the official fence. In constructing the fence they were instituting efforts that had, at least since the 1980s, been a central part of the official effort to control immigration. However, the Minutemen were also duplicating efforts that whites have been using to protect their communities away from the border. The Minuteman fence served a primarily symbolic function however. As with the gates that surround white middle class enclaves in the suburbs of California, the Minuteman fence sought to “enforce social distinctions and

differences in status” (Maher 2005:305) between the Minutemen (and whites) and would-be migrants from Mexico.

The Minutemen expand their tactical power by aligning with the state. Ehud Sprinzak (1995) argues that what distinguishes between left and right vigilante movements is that right wing movements typically compliment state efforts. He argues, “the government is rarely considered an opponent and in many cases is expected to cooperate or remain uninvolved” (1995:17-18). My research suggests that the relationship between the Minutemen and the state was much more ambiguous. MCC members explained that they were there at the border to support the Border Patrol. However, they also expressed distrust about the government that contrasted with their support of the Border Patrol. Here they marked a distinction between law enforcement officers at the local level, and bureaucrats and the institutions they represented at the state and national level. However, the Minutemen directed their activism, and their potential for violence exclusively at migrants. In so doing, the Minutemen were taking cues from decades of state activity that increasingly sought to punish undocumented immigrants and migrant communities via targeted policing, deportation, workplace surveillance, and the expansion of security and military assets and policing techniques at the border.

Not only could the Minutemen not function without the state, but the Minutemen also derive much of their legitimacy from state institutions. State activity provides both the template upon which minuteman activity is based and the logic that informs its tactics. Minutemen are limited in their capabilities because they lack the authority (and the desire) to apprehend and deport undocumented immigrants. They are further limited

by their ambivalent relationship with the state. It is this struggle that characterizes their attempts to access Wolf's fourth dimension of power: "strategic power."

Wolf defines strategic power, as "power that not only operates within settings or domains but that also organizes and orchestrates the settings themselves, and that specifies the distribution and direction of energy flows" (Wolf 1990:587). Previous studies about the Minutemen have attempted to understand if and how the minutemen have influenced public policy or extended the reach and gaze of the state (Chavez 2008; Doty 2007, 2009; Walsh 2008). Though my study touches on this, I have instead sought to explore how the actions of the state—to use Wolf's term, the strategic power of the state—have legitimized and affected the actions of the Minutemen as they attempt to secure and defend the rights and privileges of citizenship for the empowered few. It is this question that preoccupies the minds of the MCC, BPAUX and its leaders. Success is measured not by the number of migrants MCC members observed, or how many are apprehended, but on how able they are to receive plaudits and acclaim from the "boots on the ground" Border Patrol, their supervisors, and politicians in State Houses and on Capitol Hill. To use the vernacular of the MCC, the Minutemen are engaged in an attempt to limit the number of "ah shits" they receive and maximize the number of public "atta boys." The Minutemen judge their success by their ability to act like the state and to be accepted by it. This created anxiety for the Minutemen who at once mistrusted the state, but also relied on it for organizational and political support. In response, the minutemen adopted more radical tactics that at once distinguished and masked the difference between themselves and official policing agencies.

The interactions between the MCC and the Border Patrol suggest that the Minutemen are engaged in an attempt to access and harness the power of the state for their own ends. They seek to routinize their interactions with the state as a means toward achieving their economic, cultural, and political ends. In pressuring the state to interdict non-white migrants, the MCC seeks to stop the growth in Latino populations in the United States. They further seek to limit the access of Latino populations to social services including education and health care. Finally, the MCC seeks to access state power to limit the ability of Latino and migrant communities from accessing political institutions.

Though the relationship between civilian border patrols and official policing agencies retains multiple contradictions, and it remains unclear what effect private patrols have on official efforts, it is surprising how easily civilian border patrols have been able to gain access to the coercive capabilities of the state. Despite high levels of distrust on the part of state officials, politicians, and policing personnel, civilian border patrols have been able to achieve a high level of cooperation from the state. Certainly in the case of the MCC, the Border Patrol has demonstrated a very high response rate whenever the MCC has reported suspected illegal activity at the border

I have shown how the Minutemen construct themselves as white and clandestine border crossers as non-white. Moreover, I have shown how MCC volunteers identify themselves as victims of immigration who are slowly being forced to pay for migrants' health care and education, all while losing their ability to influence politics. Moreover, numerous studies have shown how the criminalization of immigrants is increasingly tied to constructions of immigrants as an "enemy" in our midst (Doty 2009; Kil and Menjivar

2006; Santa Ana 2002). One explanation for why the Border Patrol cooperates as extensively with the Minutemen may be that they are merely replicating broader patterns of police responsiveness. Specifically, multiple studies have shown that police responsiveness privileges white victims, particularly when the suspect is non-white (Bachman 1996; Howerton 2006).

Another explanation might be that the Minutemen improve the state's ability to control cross border flows and thus the Border Patrol is merely capitalizing on a productive relationship. James Walsh (2008) suggests that this may be the case when he argues that the Minutemen act as the state's "eyes and ears" thus extending the reach and gaze of the state at the border. However, as I have tried to show, though there are moments where Minuteman activity did result in apprehensions by the Border Patrol, it was impossible to track just how successful this relationship between the Minutemen and the Border Patrol was. The Border Patrol did not habitually report statistics back to the Minutemen about apprehensions, nor did they often report whether or not Minuteman observations resulted in apprehensions. Moreover, one of the defining features of the United States' border security strategy has been its complete inability to halt illicit flows of goods and people (Cornelius 2001; Cornelius and Saleyhan 2007; Donato, Durand, and Massey 1992; Kimball and Acosta 2007; Massey and Singer 1995). This has led many scholars to argue that the U.S. border security strategy is largely an illusion designed to provide employers access to cheap and disposable labor (Bornstein 2002; Heyman 1998) while maintaining the appearance of controlling the border (Andreas 2001).

I would like to offer a third explanation. I would argue that the Minutemen represent an instance of the brutalization of the U.S. public that increasingly tolerates



violent policing and military activities at the border (Kil and Menjivar 2006; Kil, Menjivar, and Doty 2009). According to recent work by Sang Kil, Cecilia Menjivar, and Roxanne Doty (2009), routine interventions at the border by an increasingly militarized Border Patrol, inure the public against violent attacks on clandestine border crossers. Because the prevailing border security discourse defines clandestine border crossers as an “enemy” the public becomes more tolerant of policing activities that push migrants into more dangerous territory and increase the risks that immigrants will be injured or killed on their journey north. According to Michael Huspek,

Militarization and criminalization draw upon the rhetoric of legitimation. The imagery of illegal immigrants has been implanted in the public consciousness in ways that instill fear, anger, and resentment among U.S. citizens. They are said to be disposed toward criminal activity, intent on taking much-needed jobs from citizen workers, or inclined to bilk the coffers of the state’s social welfare system. Thus they and the *coyotes* who aid them are said to be a threatening force that must be stopped. (2001:55)

The criminalization of clandestine border crossers allows groups like the Minutemen to justify their actions at the border and to “see themselves, not as lawbreakers, but as an additional and helpful ‘arm’ of immigration enforcement and border patrol (Kil and Menjivar 2006:171).

The cooperation between the Minutemen and the Border Patrol is further made possible by broader cultural shifts taking place within the United States due to neoliberalism. According to Susan Brin Hyatt (2001), the dismantling of the welfare state has been accompanied by a shift in the public’s understanding of the proper role of governments and individuals. According to Hyatt,

The current message is that governmental action should not be directed toward reforming the *material* environment within which poverty is lodged; instead, it is now the *cultural* environment, within which the general public’s understanding of

poverty and of the proper role of the state is being forged, that is seen as in need of transformation. One phenomenon that can be regarded as integral to these larger processes of cultural change is the current fanfare promoting the virtues of volunteerism and community service alternatives to state action.” (Hyatt 2001:203)

The Minutemen emerge as part of a broader cultural shift that not only pathologizes poor immigrants, but also pathologizes (some) state activity.

At the same time, it is clear that there are some aspects of state activity that the Minutemen find valuable and integral. When a member says, “I should not have to be here,” or “we are doing the job that the government refuses to do,” they are at once making a statement about the proper role of government and how government activity informs their own.

John W. Howard (2008) wrote in a column for Accuracy in Media, a conservative media watchdog that targets alleged liberal bias in the media, that government exists to “prevent individuals from taking the lives of others; stealing things belonging to others; physically harming others; preventing others from fully engaging their legitimate autonomy and choices.” The proper role of government, he argues, is therefore to protect “each and every citizen . . . against each and every other citizen,” and “to protect the collective citizenry from threats to their freedom from other nations or collections of people.” In other words, “its duty is to provide for the common defense, that no nation may encroach on the freedom of citizens, the protection of which is the fundamental duty of legitimate government.” Milton Friedman once wrote that “the basic functions of government are to defend the nation against foreign enemies, to prevent coercion of some individuals by others within the country, to provide a means of deciding on our rules, and to adjudicate disputes” (1993:6).

The expansion of border security efforts are therefore but one feature of a broader state effort to expand its ability to exert coercive force in ways that reflect an increasingly pervasive sentiment that the sole and proper role of government is to provide individual and national security. The emergence of civilian border patrols and their continued activity, in particular their actions aimed at normalizing their relationship with the state, are an effect of this phenomenon. The actions of the Minutemen serve as both a strong endorsement of growing state power to act coercively against racialized populations, and as a proclamation that the state should act even more powerfully and more militarily.

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