

**Spectacle in the Desert:  
The Minuteman Project on the U.S-Mexico Border**

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On April 1, 2005, volunteers began arriving along the Arizona-Mexico border, converging on Tombstone, the site of the historical Wild West shootout at the OK Corral between Wyatt Earp's men and a gang of roughneck cowboys.<sup>1</sup> These modern-day volunteers came in search of another confrontation, another example of cowboy justice, only this time the scofflaws were "illegal" immigrants. These volunteers came to be part of the Minuteman Project, a name with immediate appeal because it called forth the patriotic volunteers who fought against British rule of the American colonies. The Minuteman Project's ostensible goal was to monitor the Arizona-Mexico border in the hopes of locating clandestine border crossers. However, this surveillance operation also had a larger objective, which was to produce a spectacle that would garner public media attention and influence federal immigration policies.

The Minuteman Project's start date of April 1<sup>st</sup>, which is known as April Fool's Day in the United States and is a time to play a joke on someone else. In a sense that is what their spectacle in the desert did. It made the press into the unwitting co-conspirators of the Minuteman Project's attempt to shape public

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<sup>1</sup> Claudine LoMonaco, 'Minutemen gather in Tombstone for border watch', in Tucson Citizen, April 1, 2005, pp. A-7.

policy. By giving them something – a spectacle - to cover, the media broadcast the Minuteman Project's message about a need for greater border surveillance.

Like many spectacles, this one had costumes. The Minutemen volunteers came equipped with military fatigues, binoculars, bullet-proof vests, aircraft, walkie-talkies, even guns, since it is legal to carry firearms in Arizona.<sup>2</sup> The Minuteman Project had all the trappings of a military campaign, which is not surprising given that many of the volunteers had served in the military, serving in places such as Vietnam and Iraq.<sup>3</sup> Jim Gilchrist, the founder of the Minuteman Project, was himself wounded in Vietnam.<sup>4</sup>

This chapter attempts to contextualize the pseudo-military operation at the Arizona-Mexico border. The Minuteman Project's April 2005 offensive to monitor the Arizona-Mexico border is examined in relation to Michel Foucault's contrasting concepts of "spectacle" and "surveillance."<sup>5</sup> The Minuteman Project engaged in practices of both spectacle and surveillance to achieve its goals, especially the larger objective of targeting public opinion and the federal government's immigration policies. The Minuteman Project's border surveillance

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Riley, '1,000 activists to patrol Arizona border for migrants', in *The Denver Post*, (March 31, 2005), pp. A-06. Arthur H. Rotstein, 'Volunteer border watchers cause concern', in *Ventura County Star*, March 27, 2005, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Ioan Grillo, 'Minute patrol off to a slow start', in *Houston Chronicle*, April 2, 2005, p. A8. Michael Coronado, 'Volunteers arrive to monitor border', in *The Orange County Register*, April 2, 2005, p. News 1.

<sup>4</sup> Jennifer Delson, 'Profile of James Gilchrist', in *Los Angeles Times*, April 11, 2005, p. B2.

<sup>5</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, London, 1977.

is viewed here as a practice of power that defines the juridical border between “citizens” and “Others,” that is, “illegal aliens.”<sup>6</sup>

Michel Foucault’s concepts of “spectacle” and “surveillance” provide a useful theoretical and analytical framework for assessing the Minuteman Project and its goals. In *Discipline and Punish*, the spectacle is isomorphic with the scaffold, the public execution of prisoners in 18<sup>th</sup> century France. The spectacle was a public performance that enacted upon the body of the prisoner the power of the sovereign, and thus clarified the distinction between the sovereign and those he governed. “Its [the spectacle’s] aim is not so much to re-establish a balance as to bring into play, as its extreme point, the dissymmetry between the subject who has dared to violate the law and the all-powerful sovereign who displays his strength.”<sup>7</sup> A key to the spectacle of public torture was “above all, the importance of a ritual that was to deploy its pomp in public.”<sup>8</sup> These two aspects of the spectacle, that it demarcates power positions and does so in a public way, are central to the activities of the Minuteman Project on the U.S. Arizona border. In this case, the public performance is one that emphasizes the power and privileges of citizenship, which is controlled by the democratic state now standing in place of the sovereign. The subjects in this spectacle are the “illegal aliens” who dared to violate the law and in doing so put the privileges of citizenship into question, at least for the Minuteman organizers and participants.

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<sup>6</sup> See Susan Bibler Coutin 1995 for a discussion of surveillance and power in relation to the sanctuary movement, which also occurred in Arizona.

<sup>7</sup> Foucault 1977 *ibid*, p. 48-49.

<sup>8</sup> Foucault 1977 *ibid*, p. 49.

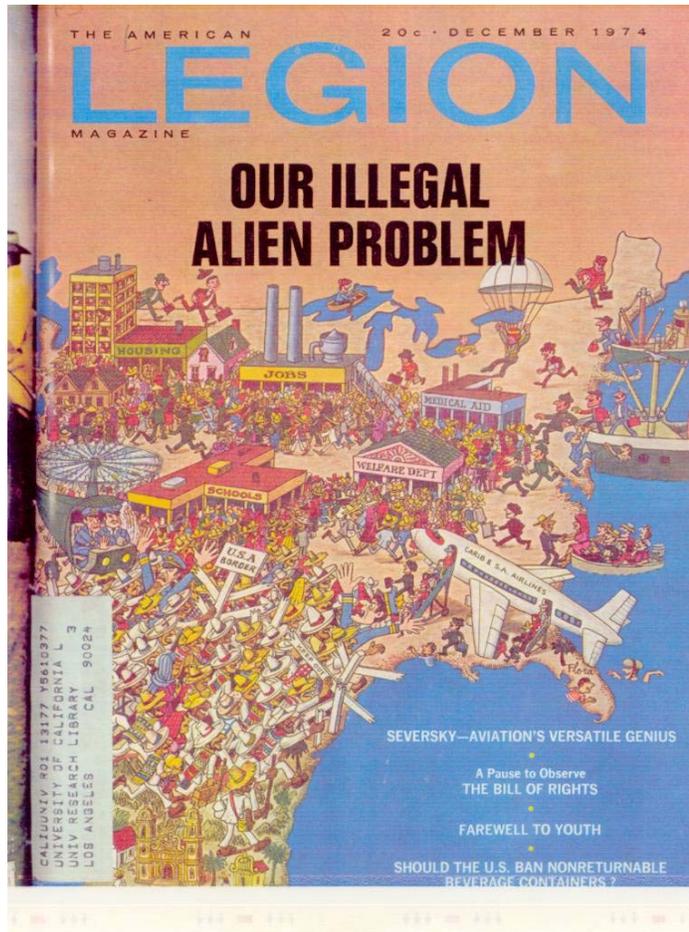
For Foucault, the move toward less public executions is coterminous with the emphasis on surveillance as a means of discipline. Surveillance, especially the totalizing practices represented by Foucault's use of the Panopticon, was a practice of power that instilled discipline in subjects, producing docile bodies. Rather than opposing these two practices, this paper views the Minuteman Project's border monitoring as a practice that combines both spectacle and surveillance. In short, the Minuteman Project used surveillance to produce a spectacle on the Arizona-Mexico border. Finding clandestine border crossers became part of the "show," and what one might describe as a "media circus." In the final analysis, the success of Minuteman Project was not in numbers of border crossers found and detained, but on the attention the project received and the disciplining it achieved, that is, the ability to force governmental reaction aligned with its cause.

Before turning to the events in Arizona, the Minuteman Project must also be contextualized historically. The following section examines the representation the Mexican immigration and the U.S.-Mexico border in public discourse as threats to the nation.

### **The U.S.-Mexico Border as a Place of Danger**

The Minuteman Project must be viewed in relation to decades of public discourse in the United States that has constructed and represented the U.S.-Mexican border as a place of danger and threat to U.S. society and culture. Research on national U.S. magazines covers and their accompanying articles found that alarm is conveyed through

images and text that directly or metaphorically invoke crisis, time bombs, invasion, reconquest, floods, war, and border breakdown.<sup>9</sup> A few of examples will have to suffice.



In December of 1974, the cover the *American Legion Magazine* depicted the United States being overrun by “illegal aliens.” Most of the cartoon people in the image are Mexicans storming, en masse, across the U.S.-Mexico border, breaking down a sign that states “USA BORDER” and another one that states “KEEP OUT.” Other immigrants are landing by boats along the East coast, flying in and swimming from the Caribbean,

<sup>9</sup> Leo R. Chavez, *Covering Immigration: Popular Images and the Politics of the Nation*, Berkeley, 2001.

parachuting across the Canadian border and all of them are converging upon, and inundating, the nation's institutions, most notably welfare, education, housing, jobs, and medical aid. Such images would become more frequent on the nation's magazines over the next three decades and they contributed to an increasingly alarmist discourse on Mexican immigration.

It should also be noted that *The American Legion Magazine* serves the U.S. armed services, which underscores the salience of the threat to U.S. society posed by Mexican immigration and the possible need for the military to be ready for action. As noted, the Minuteman Project was a quasi-military action in which ex-military played an important role, as did the ideology of protecting the nation.

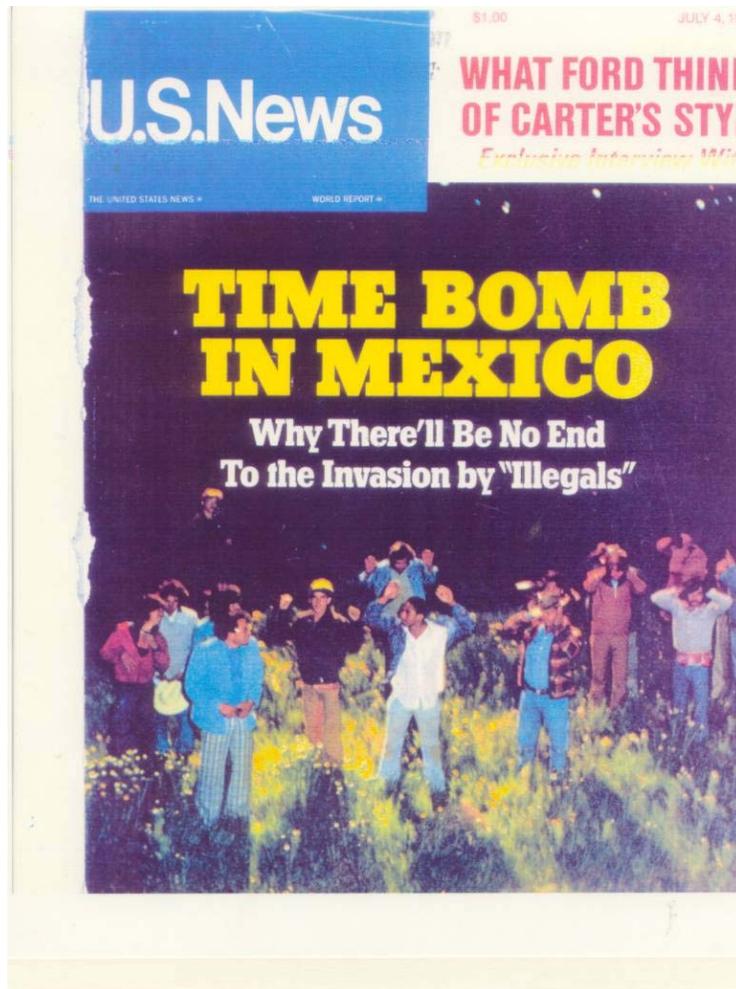
On July 4, 1977, *U.S. News & World Report's* cover again focused attention on Mexican immigration. The cover's text reads: "TIME BOMB IN MEXICO: Why There'll be No End To the Invasion of 'Illegals.'" The use of "invasion" on the cover of a mainstream national magazine is a noteworthy escalation in the alarmist discourse on Mexican immigration.<sup>10</sup> Invasion is a word that carries with it many connotations, none of them friendly or indicating mutual benefit. Friends do not invade; enemies invade.

The invasion metaphor evokes a sense of crisis related to an attack on the sovereign territory of the nation. Invasion is an act of war, and puts the nation

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<sup>10</sup> Leo R. Chavez, 2001, *ibid.*

and its people at great risk. Exactly what the nation risks by this invasion is not articulated in the image's message.



The war metaphor is enhanced by the prominence of the words “Time Bomb.” The text conjures up an image of Mexico as a bomb which, when it explodes, will damage the United States. The damage, the message makes clear, will be the unstoppable flow of illegal immigrants to the United States.

The “Mexican invasion” theme was the focus of both, *U.S. News & World Report* (March 7, 1983) and *Newsweek* (June 25, 1984). *U.S. News & World Report's* cover announced: “Invasion From Mexico: It Just Keeps Growing.” The

image on the cover is a photograph of a line of men and women being carried by men across a canal of water. At the head of the line was a woman being carried to the U.S. on the shoulders of a man. *Newsweek* had a similar cover, a photographic image of a man carrying a woman across a shallow body of water. The woman is wearing a headscarf and a long shawl. The man carries the woman's handbag, which suggests she is traveling somewhere, moving with a purpose and for an extended amount of time. She holds a walking cane. The text states: "Closing the Door? The Angry Debate Over Illegal Immigration. Crossing the Rio Grande."

Featuring women so prominently on the covers of these two national magazines while warning of an "invasion" sends a clear message about fertility and reproduction. Rather than an invading army, or even the stereotypical male migrant worker, the images suggest a more insidious invasion, one that includes the capacity of the invaders to reproduce themselves. The women being carried into U.S. territory carry with them the seeds of future generations. The images signal not simply a concern over undocumented workers, but a concern with immigrants who stay and reproduce families and, by extension, communities in the United States. These images, and their accompanying articles, allude to issues of population growth, use of prenatal care, children's health services, education, and other social services related to reproduction.

*Newsweek's* June 25, 1984 feature story characterized the public as deeply concerned with undocumented immigration and yet conflicted in their attitudes and views about what to do about it. *Newsweek* alerts us to the "fact"

that “America has ‘lost control’ of its borders” (p. 18). The report cites President Ronald Reagan, who envisioned the nation in grave peril because of this loss of control: “The simple truth is that we’ve lost control of our own borders, and no nation can do that and survive” (p. 18).

Immigration and “reconquest” came together in *U.S. News & World Report’s* August 19, 1985 cover. Its headline announces: “The Disappearing Border: Will the Mexican Migration Create a New Nation?” The accompanying article, titled “The Disappearing Border,” provides fully embellished rendition of the “reconquest” theme:

*Now sounds the march of new conquistadors in the American Southwest....By might of numbers and strength of culture, Hispanics are changing the politics, economy and language in the U.S. states that border Mexico. Their movement is, despite its quiet and largely peaceful nature, both an invasion and a revolt. At the vanguard are those born here, whose roots are generations deep, who long endured Anglo dominance and rule and who are ascending within the U.S. system to take power they consider their birthright. Behind them comes an unstoppable mass - their kin from below the border who also claim ancestral homelands in the Southwest, which was the northern half of Mexico until the U.S. took it away in the mid-1800s (p. 30).*

In the mid-1980s, the framing of the U.S.-Mexico border as a something that is “lost” and across which “invaders” come coincided with calls from

prominent political leaders to further militarize the border. In 1986, San Diego's sheriff publicly advocated for Marines to be stationed every 15 or 20 feet, day and night, along the border.<sup>11</sup> Then-Senator Pete Wilson also publicly supported this idea, should immigration reform not work to reduce the flow of undocumented immigrants across the border.<sup>12</sup> Duncan Hunter, a member of the House of Representatives from San Diego, suggested rather than the Marines, the National Guard should be stationed on the border.<sup>13</sup> Not surprisingly, the military's involvement has steadily increased since this initial controversy, with National Guard and U.S. Marines regularly deployed along the U.S.-Mexico border.<sup>14</sup>

The invasion metaphor was subtly referenced in *The Atlantic Monthly's* May 1992 feature article by William Langewiesche, which is a first-hand account of Langewiesche's travels on the U.S. side of the border. In addition to characterizing the U.S.-Mexico border as an unpleasant and dangerous place, the author includes images of a militarized border and metaphors of war throughout the article. For example, a Border Patrol officer is quoted as he

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<sup>11</sup> J. Stryker Meyer, 'Sheriff urges posting Marines along border', in San Diego Union, April 6, 1986, p. A3.

<sup>12</sup> Joe Gandelman, 'Wilson would back Marines on border if reform move fails', San Diego Union, April 6, 1986, p. A3.

<sup>13</sup> Patrick J. McDonnell, 'Hunter asks for National Guardsmen along border', in Los Angeles Times, June 24, 1986, p. B3.

<sup>14</sup> Peter Andreas, *Border Games: Policing the U.S.- Mexico Divide*, Ithaca, 2000; H.G. Reza, 'Patrols Border on Danger', in *Los Angeles Times*, June 29, 1997, p. A1; Timothy J. Dunn, *The Militarization of the U.S.-Mexico Border, 1978-1992: Low-Intensity Conflict Doctrine Comes Home*, Austin: Center for Mexican American Studies Books, 1996; Timothy J. Dunn, 'Military Collaboration with the Border Patrol in the U.S.-Mexico Border Region: Inter-Organizational Relations and Human Rights Implications', *Journal of Political and Military Sociology*, 27, 1999, pp. 257-77.

compares his nightly vigilance against illegal border crossers to Vietnam, a war, “we didn’t win there either” (p. 74). The author describes the high level of technology used along the border to “fight” smuggling, and the various contributions of U.S. military personnel to the anti-drug smuggling effort. In remote deserts, the author finds that the Army carries out training exercises designated in part to intimidate would-be drug smugglers. In southern Arizona, the National Guard, the reserve army, searches vehicles. A frustrated Customs agent also compares his work trying to stop the entry of drugs to his Vietnam experience: “It’s a civilian version of Vietnam. That makes it the second losing war I’ve fought” (p. 84). The recurring Vietnam metaphor not only helps to characterize the U.S.-Mexico border region as a war zone, but it heightens the level of frustration and anxiety over problems associated with the region. It suggests a deep sense of hopelessness about the government’s ability to successfully secure the borders and protect citizens from the various “problems” (immigrants, drugs, now terrorists) that manage to cross it clandestinely. The ideology (below) of the Minuteman Project also expresses the despair inherent in the Vietnam analogy. At the very least, in relation to Mexican immigration, raising the Vietnam analogy challenges us not to lose another “war.”

The problem of moving from the metaphor of the border as a war zone to acting as if this were actually the case became painfully obvious on May 20, 1997. On that day, a Marine Corporal shot to death 18 year-old Esequiel Hernandez Jr., an American citizen, who had been herding his family’s sheep on a hilltop near his family’s home on the U.S. side of the border near Redford,

Texas. The Corporal and three privates were stationed along the border to help the Border Patrol detect drug smugglers under an agreement with a federal agency called the Joint Task Force Six, which was established in 1989. The Marines were to observe and report to the Border Patrol. However, Esequiel Hernandez Jr. carried a .22-caliber rifle and was shooting at rocks as he passed the time guarding his sheep. Feeling themselves under attack, the Marines, who were hidden from view, observed the young man for 23 minutes, determined that he was tending his flock, but then killed Hernandez when he looked as if he was going to fire his .22 again. Controversy developed over the length of time the Marines watched Hernandez, and the fact that Hernandez was shot in the side, not in the chest, indicating he was not facing the Marines as he shot his rifle. In addition, the Marines never identified themselves nor did they render first aid to the dying Hernandez. Medical assistance was not called until the Border Patrol arrived 20 minutes later, but by then it was too late for intervention.<sup>15</sup>

Despite the inherent problems raised by the militarization of U.S. Mexico border, pundits continued to portray the border as under assault. In 2000, Samuel P. Huntington repeated the alarm of a Mexican reconquest. "The invasion of over 1 million Mexican civilians is a comparable threat [as 1 million Mexican soldiers] to American societal security, and Americans should react against it with comparable vigor. Mexican immigration looms as a unique and

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<sup>15</sup> Julia Prodis, 'Texas town outraged at Marines over shooting of goat herder', in The Orange County Register, June 29, 1997, p. News 10.

disturbing challenge to our cultural integrity, our national identity, and potentially to our future as a country.”<sup>16</sup>

The harsh reality between the metaphor of a war zone and the actual practice of increased militarization of the border region raises a number of issues, including those of human rights.<sup>17</sup> At the very least is the incongruence between military personnel trained for war and the job of the Border Patrol, which more often than not involves servicing unarmed civilians seeking work or to reunite with their family. The idea of untrained civilian border guards or militia, such as the Minutemen, expands these concerns exponentially.

The relationship of the public discourse examined here and the increased militarization of the border region that must be underscored is not that anti-immigrant discourse *caused* this push for militarization to occur. However, the discourse of invasion, the loss of U.S. sovereignty, and the representation of Mexican immigrants as the “enemy” surely contributed to an atmosphere that helped to justify increased militarization of the border as a way of “doing something” about these threats to the nation’s security and the American way of life. The Minuteman Project’s enlistment of citizens to conduct surveillance along the U.S.-Mexico border in Arizona is a logical consequence of this decades-long maelstrom of rhetoric associating Mexican immigration with narratives of threat, danger, invasion, and destruction of the American way of life.

### **The Minuteman Project**

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<sup>16</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, 'The Special Case of Mexican Immigration: Why Mexico is a Problem', in The American Enterprise, December 2000, pp. 20-2.

<sup>17</sup> Dunn, 1999, *ibid*.

In early 2005, Jim Gilchrist put a call out for “citizens” to come to the Arizona-Mexico border to monitor and report “illegal” immigrants.<sup>18</sup> Although a resident of California, Gilchrist’s motivation for his call to action was the failure of the Bush administration and the U.S. Congress to provide the funds necessary to secure the borders against the “millions of illegal migrants” flowing into the U.S from Mexico, a powerful theme in the post-9/11 political debate over security.<sup>19</sup> They chose Arizona because by 2005, that is the area where a disproportionate number of undocumented migrants crossed. Of the 1.1 million unauthorized border crossers apprehended in 2004, one-fifth were caught in one Arizona county, Cochise County, alone.<sup>20</sup> Such statistics are, as Jean and John Comaroff put it, part of the “alchemy of numbers” that help construct the rhetoric of fear discussed above.<sup>21</sup> For example, Mike McGarry, the Minuteman Project’s media liaison commented: “We have something in the neighborhood of three million people from all over the world breaking into the country. And we have an out-of-control – by any definition could be termed an invasion.”<sup>22</sup> Although such statistics can be used to signify “invasion” and “threat,” they do not illuminate the

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<sup>18</sup> Chris Strohm, 'Activists to flock to border, set up citizen patrols', National Journal Group Inc., March 28, 2005, pp. 1-5.

<sup>19</sup> Strohm, 2005, *ibid*.

<sup>20</sup> Amy Argetsinger, 'Immigration Opponents to Patrol U.S. Border: Rights Groups Condemn "Minuteman Project"', in The Washington Post, March 31, 2005, pp. A-3.

<sup>21</sup> Comaroff Jean Comaroff and John L, 'Figuring Crime: Quantifacts and the Production of the Un/Real', Public Culture, forthcoming 2006.

<sup>22</sup> democracynow.org, 'Vigilantes or Civilian Border Patrol? A Debate on the Minuteman Project', April 5, 2005.

political economy that creates a demand in the U.S. labor market for immigrant labor.<sup>23</sup> But they are useful to motivate the enlistment of Minutemen.

Gilchrist had the following goals for the Minuteman Project: a) draw attention to “illegal immigration” and the lack of border security; b) reduce the number of apprehensions along the border where they monitor; and c) influence the U.S. Congress to put a 10-year moratorium on illegal immigration and cap the number of legal immigrants to 200,000 per year.<sup>24</sup> Although monitoring the U.S.-Mexico border was Gilchrist’s immediate objective, the larger goal was to use the “citizen patrols” on the border to draw attention to Gilchrist’s larger aim of influencing public opinion and federal immigration policy.

The government’s immediate reaction to the Minuteman Project, before it actually began its operations, was not favorable. President George W. Bush took a strong position: “I’m against vigilantes in the United States of America.” 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.”<sup>25</sup> At the time Bush made this statement, he was meeting with Mexico’s President Vicente Fox, with whom Bush had discussed immigration reform early in 2001, during his first administration and before the 9/11 attacks.<sup>26</sup> The organizers of the Minuteman Project were outraged by Bush’s use of the term “vigilantes,” which carries a negative connotation, identifying a group of individuals who operate outside the

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<sup>23</sup> Jonathan X. Inda, Targeting Immigrants: Government, Technology, and Ethics, Malden, MA, 2006.

<sup>24</sup> Strohm, 2005, *ibid*.

<sup>25</sup> Strohm, 2005, *ibid*.

<sup>26</sup> James F. Smith and Edwin Chen, 'Bush to Weigh Residency for Illegal Mexican Immigrants', in Los Angeles Times, September 7, 2001, pp. A-1.

law, or “rational” law enforcement, by taking action into their own hands. Gilchrist continually stressed that the Minuteman Project was a non-violent protest along the lines of Martin Luther King.<sup>27</sup> However, one of the main concerns of the Minuteman Project organizers in the days leading up to April 1<sup>st</sup> was the possibility for violence, given that many of the volunteers would carry guns. Moreover, one of the organizers, Chris Simcox, had been convicted on federal weapons charges and the white supremacist group Aryan Nation was recruiting Minuteman volunteers.<sup>28</sup> In addition to President Bush’s condemnation of the Minuteman Project, Joe Garza, spokesman for the Border Patrol’s Tucson sector, dismissed the Minuteman Project’s impact, stating that the agency is not planning to change any operations as a result of the Minutemen’s activities.<sup>29</sup>

Despite such official reservations about the Minuteman Project, Jim Gilchrist was proclaiming success a few days before the Minuteman Project volunteers were even to begin arriving in Arizona: “I struck the mother lode. It has already accomplished what we want to accomplish: nationwide awareness. And we haven’t even started the project yet.”<sup>30</sup> Gilchrist’s emphasis on nationwide awareness underscores the public spectacle nature of the Minuteman Project and its goal of disciplining of the federal government.

It is easy to see why Gilchrist was claiming success before the Minuteman Project began operations. On March 30, 2005, two days before the

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<sup>27</sup> David Kelly, 'Border Watchers Capture Their Prey - the Media', Los Angeles Times, April 5, 2005, pp. A-1.

<sup>28</sup> Michael Marizco, 'Abusive acts vs. entrants are ignored, activists say', in Arizona Daily Star, (March 29, 2005), pp. A-1.

<sup>29</sup> Strohm, 2005, *ibid*.

<sup>30</sup> Strohm, 2005, *ibid*, p1.

official start date of the Minuteman Project, the Bush administration announced that more than 500 additional Border Patrol agents would be deployed along the Arizona-Mexico border, bringing the total to about 2,900, and additional aircraft. In addition, top Homeland Security officials would be arriving in Tucson, Arizona to add to the visible display of the administration's efforts to enforce the border.<sup>31</sup> Government officials claimed there was no connection to this new deployment of resources to the Arizona border.<sup>32</sup> However, a spokesman for the Minuteman Project, Bill Bennett, pointed to these deployments as a sign of success: "President Bush called the Minuteman Project a bunch of vigilantes – but if it's the case that this [federal crackdown] did start because of the Minuteman Project, then the project is a success. I find it very interesting that this is all coinciding."<sup>33</sup>

#### **April 2005 on the Arizona-Mexico Border**

Minuteman volunteers officially began operations on April 1, 2005. Organizers expected 1,300 volunteers.<sup>34</sup> By April 2, however, only about two hundred volunteers had shown up and were stationed in seven outposts along a 23-mile stretch of border.<sup>35</sup> One newspaper described the Minutemen's activities this way: "In four member teams, they rode out caravan-style for several miles along red-dirt roads flanked by rocks and prickly brush. They fanned out

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<sup>31</sup> Ricardo Alonso-Zaldivar, 'U.S. to Bolster Arizona Border Security', in Los Angeles Times, (March 30, 2005), pp. A-12.

<sup>32</sup> Amy Argetsinger, March 31, 2005, Los Angeles Times.

<sup>33</sup> Alonso-Zaldivar, March 30, 2005, Los Angeles Times.

<sup>34</sup> Claudine LoMonaco, 'Minutemen gather in Tombstone for border watch', in Tucson Citizen, April 1, 2005, pp. A-7.

<sup>35</sup> David Kelly, 'Citizens Border Patrols Hurry Up ... and Wait', in Los Angeles Times, April 3, 2005, pp. A-20.

hundreds of yards apart along a skimpy barbed wire fence at the Mexico border, eager to catch men and women trying to sneak into the United States.”<sup>36</sup>

The volunteers’ motivations for coming echoed the discourse on Mexican immigration discussed above. “We have an illegal invasion of our country going on now that is affecting our schools, our healthcare system and our society in general. No society can sustain this.”<sup>37</sup> Another said about immigration, “It’s destroying America.”<sup>38</sup> Another noted, “I’d like to see my brother get a wheel chair lift rather than an illegal alien get a free education. I just think you’ve got to take care of your own.”<sup>39</sup> Yet another noted, “I think all of this will put the federal government on notice as to where we stand as citizens.”<sup>40</sup> Such comments clearly delineate simple dichotomies, such as us/them, invaders/invaded, destroyers/victims, illegal/“our own” or legitimate members of society, and citizens/non-citizens, that define both citizens and those in a position “illegality.”<sup>41</sup>

Although the number of Minutemen was less than anticipated, the media turned up in full force. In fact, as the *Los Angeles Times* observed: “The number of media members here Friday to cover the volunteer border patrols nearly outnumbered the Minutemen. Reporters from around the world descended on Tombstone, population 4,800. Along with journalists came some filmmakers

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<sup>36</sup> Margaret Talev, 'Minuteman Volunteers Give Motives: Middle Aged Whites Express Frustrations with Illegal Crossings', in The Modesto Bee, April 4, 2005, pp. A-10.

<sup>37</sup> David Kelly, 'Minutemen Prepare to Lay Down the Law', in *Los Angeles Times*, (April 2, 2005), pp. A-15.

<sup>38</sup> Talev, April 4, 2005, *ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Talev, April, 2005, *ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Kelly, April 3, 2005, *ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Mae M. Ngai, Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America, Princeton, 2004.

working on documentaries about the U.S.-Mexico border.”<sup>42</sup> Ironically, Chris Simcox, editor of the *Tombstone Tumbleweed* and one of the organizers of the Minuteman Project, seemed to blame the media for manufacturing the event: “The media has created this frenzy and this monster. They are looking for Bigfoot, the Loch Ness monster, the vigilante.”<sup>43</sup> However, Jim Gilchrist was more candid: “We have already accomplished our goal a hundredfold in getting the media out here and getting the message out.”<sup>44</sup> As Gilchrist’s comment indicates, the Minuteman Project’s goal of creating a spectacle is clearly elevated above other objectives originally elaborated for the Minuteman Project. Indeed, the other goals seemed to have been forgotten, perhaps reflecting the fewer than expected volunteers. Or perhaps this lays bare the point being made here, that media attention was their only real objective in staging this spectacle.

On April 3, the media reported on still larger increases in surveillance power along the Arizona-Mexico border. The Department of Homeland Security upped the ante to more than 700 additional border patrol agents to the area.<sup>45</sup> In addition, the U.S. Senate approved an amendment to hire 2,000 border patrol agents, a direct affront to President Bush’s 2006 budget, which called for only an additional 216 new border patrol agents.<sup>46</sup> Both the new deployments of agents and new hiring goals come just as Minuteman were beginning to monitor the border.

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<sup>42</sup> Kelly, April 5, 2005, *ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Kelly, April 5, 2005, *ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Kelly, April 5, 2005, *ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Samantha Levine, 'Border guard shift questioned', in Houston Chronicle, April 3, 2005, pp. A-16.

<sup>46</sup> Levine, April 3, 2005, *ibid.*

By April 5<sup>th</sup> there appeared to be fewer clandestine border crosses in the areas monitored by the Minuteman. Chris Simcox was quick to claim another success: “We’ve shut down the whole sector. That’s success.”<sup>47</sup> However, the reduced numbers of clandestine border crossers was also influenced by other factors, not the least of which was the Mexican police force, Grupo Beta, patrolling the Mexican side of the border, warning would-be migrants of the Minutemen’s presence.<sup>48</sup> Two weeks into the project, the Border Patrol had apprehended about the same number of clandestine border crossers as during the same period the year before.<sup>49</sup> However, such considerations did not deter Jim Gilchrist from bragging: “None of this would have happened if it wasn’t for the Minuteman action. This thing was a dog and pony show designed to bring in the media and get the message out and it worked.”<sup>50</sup>

Although the Minuteman Project was to be a month long monitoring exercise, Jim Gilchrist claimed “victory” and formally ended the project’s border monitoring on Wednesday, April 20, 2005.<sup>51</sup> Border monitoring was to continue, however, under the guise of Civil Homeland Defense, headed by Chris Simcox. Also, the Minuteman Project spawned related projects along the U.S.-Mexico border in Texas, New Mexico, California, and far from the border in Idaho and

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<sup>47</sup> Michael Coronado, 'Wary groups in border watch', in Orange County Register, April 5, 2005, p. News 1.

<sup>48</sup> Coronado, April 5, 2005, *ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Chris Richard, 'The Buzz on the Border', in The Press-Enterprise (Riverside, CA), April 14, 2005, pp. A-01.

<sup>50</sup> Kelly, 2005a, *ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> Michael Coronado, 'Minutemen quit patrol early but declare victory', in The Orange County Register, April 19, 2005, pp. B-1.

Michigan.<sup>52</sup> The fallout from the Minuteman Project also had other ramifications. On April 19<sup>th</sup>, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Governor of California, caused quite a political furor when he announced that closing the borders was a good idea. “Close the borders in California and all across, between Mexico and the United States....because I think it is just unfair to have all these people coming across,” adding that border enforcement is “lax.”<sup>53</sup> In mid-August (August 12 and 15, respectively) the governors of New Mexico and Texas went even further, declaring their respective counties along the U.S.-Mexico border “disaster areas,” thus freeing up government funds to spend in the region.<sup>54</sup> Although the Minuteman Project’s April offensive ended prematurely, it helped to turn the public debate on immigration reform decidedly toward increased border enforcement, eclipsing guestworker programs, legalization programs and other issues.

Jim Gilchrist managed to turn his 15 minutes of fame into an extended spotlight on “illegal aliens” and the U.S.-Mexico border by running as the American Independent Party’s candidate for U.S. Congress in Orange County, California. The 48<sup>th</sup> Congressional District is solidly Republican, but Gilchrist managed to use his one-issue campaign to stir up politics. His campaign attracted media attention and a war chest of about \$500,000, both of which

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<sup>52</sup> Susan Carroll, 'Border watch to widen: Minuteman Project plans to patrol more states', in Republic Tucson Bureau, April 19, 2005, p. 1; Jerry Seper, 'Border patrols inspire imitation - Other civilians take up cause', in The Washington Times, April 16, 2005, pp. A-01.

<sup>53</sup> Herbert A. Sample, 'Governor talks of closing Mexico border', in The Sacramento Bee, April 20, 2005, pp. A-3.

<sup>54</sup> Nicole Gaguette, 'Border Troubles Divide U.S., States', in Los Angeles Times, August 18, 2005, pp. A-1.

helped him win third place in the November 29, 2005 primary election, with 15% of the vote.<sup>55</sup> Gilchrist still came third in the final election on December 6, 2005, but he increased his share of the electorate to 25%.<sup>56</sup> In the process of the campaign, the favorite candidate and eventual winner, John Campbell, had to insist that he, too, was tough on immigration. Two votes Campbell cast as a member of the California legislator became favorite Gilchrist targets. One vote allowed undocumented students who grew up in California to pay in-state tuition rather than the more costly tuition charged students from foreign countries when attending public colleges and universities. The other vote concerned Mexican consulate cards and their use as valid identification in California. By the time of the final election, Campbell had repudiated these votes and joined Gilchrist in opposing a guestworker program and other moderate immigration reforms.<sup>57</sup> Immediately following his defeat at the polls, Jim Gilchrist assured his followers of his intentions to continue to seek elected office and to focus attention on “illegal immigration.”<sup>58</sup> In other words, he would continue to use the spectacle of surveillance to garner media attention.

### **The Spectacle Revisited**

Renato Rosaldo has observed: “The U.S.-Mexico border has become theater, and border theater has become social violence. Actual violence has

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<sup>55</sup> Jean O. Pasco and Dan Weikel, 'O.C. Race a Border Skirmish', Los Angeles Times, December 4, 2005.

<sup>56</sup> Jean O. Pasco, 'Campbell Wins Seat; Gilchrist Takes 3rd', Los Angeles Times, December 7, 2005.

<sup>57</sup> Mark Z. Barabak and Jean O. Pasco, 'Election as Immigration Bellweather ', Los Angeles Times December 8, pp. B-1.

<sup>58</sup> Barabak and Pasco, Decemer 8, 2005, *ibid*.

become inseparable from symbolic ritual on the border – crossings, invasions, lines of defense, high-tech surveillance, and more.”<sup>59</sup> To this list I would add the Minuteman Project. The border theater that occurred in Arizona was, indeed, a symbolic ritual of surveillance.

However, the Minutemen’s monitoring may not have provided a great deterrent to clandestine border crossers in the long run. First of all, the demand for immigrant labor continues to act as a magnet for Mexicans and others. This demand results from a complex set of interacting factors, none of which are carefully examined in the Minuteman Project’s public discourse. For example, rarely if ever discussed are the effects of low fertility rates and an aging U.S. population, especially during periods of economic expansion; middle and upper class Americans’ desire for cheap commodities, food, and services; economic pressures related to globalization and low-wage production in developing countries; or the economic benefits of immigration, not the least of which is their consumption of U.S. goods, or as *BusinessWeek* magazine put it on its July, 18, 2005 cover: “Embracing Illegals: Companies are getting hooked on the buying power of 11 million undocumented immigrants.” Simply increasing surveillance along the U.S.-Mexico border does little to address these salient factors creating a demand for the type of labor supplied by undocumented migrants.

Consequently, the Minuteman Project’s monitoring of a small area along the

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<sup>59</sup> Renato Rosaldo, 'Cultural citizenship, inequality, and multiculturalism', in Latino Cultural Citizenship, edited by W. V. Flores and R. Benmayor, Boston, 1997, pp. 27-38.

U.S.-Mexico border probably resulted in potential unauthorized border crossers moving elsewhere, seeking less guarded areas.

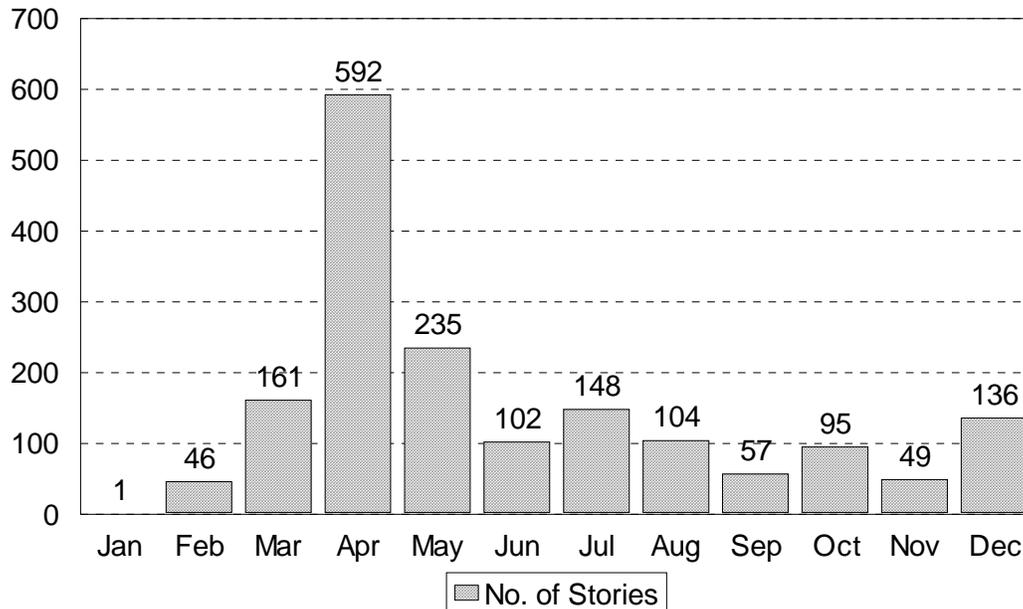
Without a doubt, however, the spectacle of surveillance was very effective in reaching the target audience, the public. The Minuteman Project's April "offensive" on the Arizona-Mexico border was a media success, or as one newspaper put it: "Sifting hoopla from hard facts can be tricky, but Minuteman Project has succeeded in key goal – shifting nation's eyes to illegal immigration."<sup>60</sup> Not only did the media turn out in full force, but stories on the Minuteman Project saturated newspapers nationwide.

As the chart below indicates, newspaper stories on the Minuteman Project went from a few score a month in February to almost six hundred in April. While there was a precipitous drop in the number of citations to the Minuteman Project in the months after April, the number did not fall to pre-March levels the rest of the year. There continued to be an interest in Minuteman activities for months after the April spectacle, rising sharply again in December with coverage of Jim Gilchrist's run for Congress.

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<sup>60</sup> Richard, April 14, 2005, *ibid.*

## Newspaper Stories on the Minuteman Project January to December 2005



Source: America's Newspapers Online Database

From the perspective of critical cultural analysis, the spectacle in the desert has many connotations. The Minuteman Project grew out of a sense of frustration with new global realities that reduce the power of national borders to delimit the nation-state as an autonomous territory. Anthropologists have been arguing that these flows reflect the unmoored or deterritorialized nature of contemporary post-nation-state realities that make national borders permeable in many ways.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, the world is now on the move as capital, culture, people, and information flow across once ponderous national borders at an increasingly

<sup>61</sup> Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, eds., Culture, Power, Place: Ethnography at the End of an Era, Durham, 1997, pp. 1-29.

rapid pace.<sup>62</sup> The organizers and sympathizers of the Minuteman Project viewed its activities as a stand against the destruction of the nation-state symbolized by the inability of the state to control the flow of unauthorized border crosses. For the Minutemen, the “breakdown” of border, as they perceived it, was an empirical assertion that the border was, for all practical purposes, a legal fiction.<sup>63</sup> Their dramatics were an attempt to reaffirm the contours of the nation-state, which from their perspective was in danger of being “lost.” Through their actions, the Minutemen hoped to restore the nation-state’s clearly defined border around its territory. The spectacle of surveillance on the Arizona-Mexico border drew the line, as it were, along the U.S.-Mexico border.

The Minuteman Project engaged in a performance that inscribed citizenship and the nation similar to the way anthropologists have shown for gender.<sup>64</sup> Through the dramatics of their “hunt” for non-citizen “prey,” the Minutemen enacted a rite of policing non-citizens, an act of symbolic power and violence that defined their own citizen-subject status. At the same time, the spectacle in the desert was a nation-defining performance. Unauthorized border crosses, those “space invaders” as Puwar might put it, were kept in their own

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<sup>62</sup> Arjun Appadurai, Modernity a Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization, Minneapolis, 1996); Jonathan Xavier Inda and Renato Rosaldo, eds., The Anthropology of Globalization, Malden, MA, 2002.

<sup>63</sup> Susan Bibler Coutin, 'Being En Route', American Anthropologist, 107, 2005, pp. 195-206.

<sup>64</sup> Judith Butler, Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex", New York, 1993; Joan Cassell, 'Doing Gender, Doing Surgery: Women Surgeons in a Man's Profession', Human Organization, 56, 1997.

national territory.<sup>65</sup> For a couple of weeks in a small area along the 2,000 mile U.S.-Mexico border, the danger to the nation posed by people out of place was averted.<sup>66</sup> The Minutemen's monitoring of the border was a corporal spectacle and for many the Minutemen came to embody the citizen exerting power to preserve the privileges, and purity, of citizenship and the integrity of the nation-state.

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<sup>65</sup> Nirmal Puwar, *Space Invaders: Race, Gender and Bodies Out of Place*, Oxford, 2004.

<sup>66</sup> Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, London, 1966.

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