THREATENING IMMIGRANTS: CULTURAL DEPICTIONS OF UNDOCUMENTED MEXICAN IMMIGRANTS IN CONTEMPORARY US AMERICA

Katharine Lee Schaab

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Committee:
Jolie Sheffer, Advisor
Lisa Hanasono
Graduate Faculty Representative
Rebecca Kinney
Susana Peña
ABSTRACT

Jolie Sheffer, Advisor

This project analyzes how contemporary US cultural and legislative texts shape US society’s impression of undocumented (im)migrants and whether they fit socially constructed definitions of what it means to “be American” or part of the US national imaginary. I argue that (im)migrant-themed cultural texts, alongside legal policies, participate in racial formation projects that use racial logic to implicitly mark (im)migrants as outsiders while actively employing ideologies rooted in gender, economics, and nationality to rationalize (im)migrants’ exclusion or inclusion from the US nation-state. I examine the tactics anti- and pro-(im)migrant camps utilize in suppressing the role of race—particularly the rhetorical strategies that focus on class, nation, and gender as rationale for (im)migrants’ inclusion or exclusion—in order to expose the similar strategies governing contemporary US (im)migration thought and practice. This framework challenges dichotomous thinking and instead focuses on gray areas. Through close readings of political and cultural texts focused on undocumented (im)migration (including documentaries, narrative fiction, and photography), this project homes in on the gray areas between seemingly pro- and anti-(im)migrant discourses. I contend (im)migration-themed political and popular rhetoric frequently selects a specific identity marker (e.g. gender or socio-economic status—never race) and depicts it as the single factor influencing US border monitoring and defense. In order to demonstrate this argument, I place legal texts in conversation with cultural texts. Taken together, political and cultural texts show the emergent strategies for discussing undocumented (im)migration without directly discussing race or racial inequalities, as the texts deny or have purportedly resolved racial inequalities.
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I also wish to say thank you to the creators of the Border Film Project for granting me permission to use the photographs featured in chapter three. While my analysis of their work is at times critical, I appreciate their commitment to actively participating in political and cultural conversations surrounding undocumented immigration.

There were many, many moments from proposal to defense when I felt consumed by this project. Helping to pull me out of my writing bubble, Johni Amos, Mallory Jagodzinski, and Lisa Kaplan all served as sounding boards and offered fun times and good memories. A number of other friends—in BG and beyond—cheered me on along the way; the notes of encouragement and continued support mean so much. Thank you to my family for their unending love and belief in me as I work(ed) toward my goals, especially my parents and sister. Finally, the biggest thank
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INTRODUCTION

In the decades following US movements for civil rights, race became a “dirty” word for many white US Americans who tried to distance themselves from charges of racism and discussions concerning racial inequality. While anti-racist activists continue(d) to demand individual and systemic address of racial injustice, aggressive political and cultural campaigns have offered pushback against civil rights movement victories.¹ This pushback, which sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva names “color-blind racism,” claims to prioritize the nation-state’s economic, political, and cultural welfare over policies and practices allegedly offering unfair advantages to US racial minorities.² As Bonilla-Silva argues, “Because post-Civil Rights racial norms disallow the open expression of racial views, whites have developed a concealed way of voicing them.” (57). My work considers the consequences of seemingly race-neutral language, and even color-blind racism, on immigration-themed rhetoric in the US post-Civil Rights Movement era, specifically since the passage of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA).

Throughout this project, I examine the tactics anti- and pro-immigrant cultural texts utilize in hiding the role of race—particularly rhetorical strategies that focus on class, nation, and gender as rationale for immigrants’ inclusion or exclusion from the US nation-state—in order to expose how contemporary US immigration thought and practice minimize the role of race. My project challenges dichotomous thinking, for “we have become so accustomed to antinomal thinking that we tend to create the pairs of opposites. We do not see the gray or look for the

¹ In Chapter 7 of Racial Formation, Michael Omi and Howard Winant track how the New Right “rearticulated” issues of race and racial inequality by claiming liberals treated blacks differently than whites and were thus guilty of racism (against both black and whites).
² A note about the term “colorblind” racism: some advocates, bloggers, and scholars have critiqued the phrase as an ableist appropriation of the medical condition colorblindness. For example, see the tubmlr “colorblinding.”
continuum” (Dowd, Levit, and McGinley 34). Through close readings of political and cultural texts (including documentaries, narrative fiction, and photography) focused on undocumented immigration, this project homes in on the gray areas between seemingly pro- and anti-immigrant discourses. I contend immigration-themed political and popular rhetoric frequently selects a specific identity marker (e.g. gender or socio-economic status—never race) and depicts it as the single factor influencing US border monitoring and defense. Focusing on gender, for example, as a rationale for immigrants’ inclusion or exclusion minimizes the role of race in US immigration discourse. In order to demonstrate this argument, I place legal texts in conversation with cultural texts reflecting Natalia Molina’s understanding that social structure is “the ‘scaffolding’ of race—the laws, customs, and policies—while cultural representation is more about the way we see and experience race, as well as its discursive element” (How Race 3). Simply put, laws and policies impart official, state-sanctioned positions on race, with cultural texts offering accessible language and ideas that help shape popular attitudes. Taken together, political and cultural texts show the emergent strategies for discussing undocumented immigration without directly discussing race or racial inequalities, as the texts deny or have purportedly resolved racial inequalities.

Scholars have interrogated undocumented immigration from various (inter)disciplinary standpoints. I highlight a few approaches and significant studies in order to situate my project within the broad fields of US immigration and US border studies. To begin with, historically framed work on immigration such as Mae M. Ngai’s Impossible Subjects, Daniel Kanstroom’s

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3 Dowd et al. draw upon Claude Levi-Strauss’ critique of envisioning the world through dichotomies.
4 Molina’s treatment of race as “socially constructed in relational ways” builds upon Omi and Winant’s description of race as “always and necessarily a social and historical process” (55). In a similar vein, Deborah A. Boehm argues, “the overlapping spheres of state power and intimate lives cannot be separated” (9).
Deportation Nation, and Cheryl Shanks’ Immigration and the Politics of American Sovereignty have primarily placed political and legal decisions at the center of investigation. Using sources such as government statistics, court cases, and legislation, these studies address federal and state governments’ roles in producing racialized subjects through uneven immigration laws; yet, this approach can sometimes silence or minimize the voices of “ordinary” or “everyday” people.\(^5\) In contrast to historical investigation, sociologists tend to focus on human actions and social structures. For example, Jorge Durand and Douglas S. Massey’s edited collection, Crossing the Border, uses empirical data from the Mexican Migration Project to show how US immigration policies of the 1990s are rooted in policy makers’ fundamental misconceptions of who immigrants are, where they immigrate from and why, and their plans for staying in the US. In Gendered Transitions, Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo utilizes interviews and ethnographic research to show how IRCA contributed to an increase in undocumented Mexicans in the US and how immigrants form relationships and communities in the US. Scholars have also critically examined immigration discourse through the lens of cultural texts, as exhibited by John-Michael Rivera’s The Emergence of Mexican America or David R. Maciel and María Herrera-Sobek’s collection Culture across Borders. These texts prioritize cultural production, offer a platform for the voices and experiences of everyday people, and effectively show how countercultural texts and their messages challenge dominant texts. Yet, none of these approaches evaluates the shared strategies used by ostensibly disparate pro- and anti-US immigration camps. Employing aspects of each of these disciplines, my research investigates the relationship between social structures

\(^5\) Of course, there is a body of historical scholarship that privileges cultural texts and “everyday” voices. Cultural histories such as Michael Denning’s The Cultural Front, Nan Enstad’s Ladies of Labor, or David Gutiérrez’s Walls and Mirrors (which offers a cultural history of Mexican immigration to the US) all serve as examples.
and conditions through the lens of culture, while examining the relationships between race, gender, sexuality, class, and nation in US immigration discourse in order to make visible the relationship between anti- and pro-immigration viewpoints.⁶

Privileging an interdisciplinary and intersectional analysis, I situate my project within the fields of border studies, cultural studies, ethnic studies, and women’s studies.⁷ This interdisciplinary approach illustrates the breadth and complexity of US immigration discourse, specifically how anti- and pro-immigrant ideologies overlap and diverge as they propagate racial logic and participate in racial formation projects targeting undocumented immigrants. Much of the current research on immigration offers a divided treatment of anti- and pro-immigrant discourse, suggesting that separate ideologies motivate and shape each side. Yet, as sociologists Philip Kretsedemas and David C. Brotherton remind us, pro-immigration does not necessarily translate into a pro-immigrant, social justice framework; for example, “proimmigration conservatives also support most of the get tough enforcement measures being advocated by immigration restrictionists” (“Open” 2). “Threatening Immigrants” pushes beyond this binary treatment. Through a comparative analysis, I show anti- and pro-immigrant US cultural texts employing shared rhetorical strategies, signifying a larger cultural shift in US treatments of race, gender, and nationality. I examine the shared tactics and suppression of race in US immigrant discourse, revealing how post-IRCA immigration discourse embraces color-blind racism and

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⁶ Historian George J. Sánchez emphasizes the future of immigration history depends on the field’s ability to incorporate the insights of race, nation, and culture (21).

⁷ Differentiating between transnational, diasporic, and borderland studies, Mae M. Ngai explains: “Unlike transnational studies that consider movement between two places at some distance from each other, and diasporic histories that follow a global dispersal from a single source, borderland history focuses on the dynamics of a contact zone that overlaps the jurisdictions of neighboring nation-states” (Major Problems 148). Following Ngai’s definition, I place my work in conversation with border(lands) studies.
participates in anti-feminist backlash in justifying the inclusion or exclusion of undocumented immigrants.

Before shifting to a discussion on the central political and cultural texts in this work, I want to address a few choices I have made regarding terminology. First, following the lead of scholars such as D. Robert DeChaine, I use the terms “US America” and “US American” because “America” and “American” “generalize and homogenize an entire continent and its populations” (15) and often centralize and normalize the lives and experiences of persons living in the US. “US America” and “US American” disrupt this pattern by recognizing the US and its citizens represent one segment of the Americas. Second, I use the term undocumented when referencing persons who enter the US without federal authorization. Like most scholars, I avoid the pejorative and dehumanizing term “illegal,” using it only when quoting a legislative or cultural text that uses that language. For, as scholars Andreas Feldmann and Helena Olea argue, “The use of the term ‘illegals’ underscores the migratory status of a noncitizen…[and] conveys the message that this person’s very existence is in violation of the law” (140). Finally, I have used the terms “immigration” and “immigrant” in setting up this project. Yet, I prefer the blended terms (im)migration and (im)migrants, because they recognize the elasticity and overlap of the politically- and historically-constructed categories “migrant” and “immigrant.” Using the term (im)migrant (though alongside immigrant and migrant), anthropologist Deborah A. Boehm argues it refuses “either/or tropes” and resists US efforts to force “transnational Mexicans into particular categories” (6).

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8 This classification also includes people whose “legal” presence lapses. The legislative and cultural texts used in this study focus on people who enter the US (or are assumed to have entered) without authorization. Deborah A. Boehm uses “unauthorized” and “undocumented” to describe migrants labeled as “illegal” by the US Department of Homeland Services and public discourse (19).

9 Taking a different stand on the use of the term “illegal,” Ngai uses the term “illegal alien,” with alien signifying a person “who is not a citizen” and illegal alien referencing a person “unlawfully present” (Impossible xix).
A number of assumptions circulate about migrant/migration and immigrant/immigration, which often place migrants and immigrants at odds. For example, in the context of the contemporary US, migrant may signify a person who does not plan to settle long-term and who moves around the country seasonally in response to labor demands. Complicating these assumptions, sociologists Ewa Morawska and Willfried Spohn assert that migrants participate in “one-way as well as repeated movements across nation-state boundaries…for permanent or shorter- and longer-term sojourns” (23). Diverging from popular assumptions about migrants, the term immigrant may signify a person who plans on settling in the US long-term (in a specific and planned location) and, therefore, seeks legal residency. Pointing to the origins of such assumptions, historian Mae M. Ngai indicates “immigrant” is “a legal status that refers to an alien who comes for permanent settlement—a ‘legal permanent resident’—and who may be naturalized as a citizen” (*Impossible* xix). Of additional concern, neither term fully encompasses the diversity among (im)migrants, including why people (im)migrate (e.g. political, economic, educational, security-based reasons), the various places from which they originate, the possibility of living binational lives, shifting legal statuses, and the numerous personal and cultural markers that create a heterogeneous population. For all of these reasons, I use the terms (im)migrant and (im)migration throughout this project in order to foreground the range and variety of experiences.

**Key US (Im)migration Policies**

US federal and state legislative bodies have considered and passed numerous laws and policies concerning (im)migration during the nation’s history. Although this study focuses largely on cultural depictions of undocumented (im)migrants, it also examines legislative texts in order to understand the socio-political context in which the cultural text was produced and
“because [laws] structure and lend meaning” to “why we think about race and citizenship as we do” (Molina, *How Race* 11). Further stressing the need to interrogate legislative texts, historian Victor Alejandro Sorell stipulates, “immigration policies…have been proposed and enacted through codified spoken and written language. Revealingly, the actual language of that legislation…is arguably among the least scrutinized aspects of immigration vis à vis culture” (111). In evaluating US political and legal treatments of undocumented (im)migration and US (im)migration discourse and its treatment of race in the post-civil rights movements’ era, this project closely assesses four contemporary US legal actions. Chapter one features the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA), which sociologist Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo argues “had a more profound impact on undocumented immigrants than any other piece of legislation ever passed in the United States” (xiv). Hondagneu-Sotelo bases this bold claim upon IRCA’s provisions (discussed below) and the disparity between IRCA’s restrictive entry clauses and legalization programs and its portrayal in the media as a liberal and generous policy (xiv). In addition to IRCA, I also offer close readings of California Proposition 187 (1994), The Secure Fence Act of 2006, and Arizona’s SB 1070 (2010) in subsequent chapters. Each chapter includes a lengthier treatment of these selected legislative actions, but I want to begin by contextualizing these acts within a broader history of US (im)migration reform and regulatory efforts that have seen closed-border proponents position (im)migrants and other foreigners as cultural and political threats to the US nation-state.  

The US nation-state has relied on the legislative branch to enact (im)migration laws restricting access to the country on the basis of race and the judicial branch to uphold and

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10 Some of these threats manifest in the form of arguments indicating (im)migrants bear too many children, steal jobs and resources from US citizens, and will change the population dynamics so the US is no longer a “white nation.”
enforce prevailing racial logic. Laws such as the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act and the 1924 Johnson-Reed Act (as well as the informal 1907 Gentleman’s Agreement) served as early gatekeeping mechanisms that limited (im)migrants’ access to the US. The restrictions established by these laws were supposedly based upon country of origin; however, gatekeeping laws targeted specific nations (those whose inhabitants were not read as white within a precise sociohistoric moment), thus positioning “non-white” (im)migrants as undesirable and unassimilable. For example, the Chinese Exclusion Act and the Gentleman’s Agreement clearly targeted the Chinese and Japanese, respectively, and marked each cohort as unwelcome. Johnson-Reed favored (im)migrants from Northern and Western European nations over those from Southern and Eastern nations, or persons deemed “swarthy.” While exclusion is based upon various factors including class, political affiliation, and job and language skills, historian Erika Lee argues gatekeeping laws ultimately have “racialized roots” (119), which continue to infiltrate contemporary legislative actions.

The racialized roots that permeate legal decisions and policies also intersect and reproduce anxieties about a secure state, indicating national security depends upon keeping out racial and national outsiders. Historically, the US-Mexico border has been a site for managing and excluding foreigners deemed a threat to the US. The varying levels of attention paid to the US southern border by federal officials, including the enactment and enforcement of laws denouncing foreigners’ unrestricted entry, reveals an ever-changing relationship with Mexico

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11 As a social construct, the nation-state’s understanding of whiteness and who is deemed white has changed since the nineteenth century.
12 The history of security at the US southern border is long and complex. It has been well documented in other studies, though a cursory overview of select US political actions and enforcement measurers demonstrates the historically tenuous and hierarchical relationship between US Americans and Mexicans. See Mae M. Ngai’s Impossible Subjects (2004) for a more comprehensive analysis of the history of US immigration laws, and Kevin R. Johnson and Bernard Trujillo’s Immigration Law and the US-Mexico Border (2011) for analysis on immigration laws targeting Mexican (im)migrants.
and its citizens based upon US political, cultural, and economic demands.

Following the Mexican-American War, the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo redrew US-Mexico borderlines, ceding to the US much of what we now define as the southwestern US. The treaty also permitted (or forced) Mexicans living in annexed territory to become US citizens and live under US jurisdiction; it marked Mexicans as white but also positioned them as a “conquered population” (Ngai Impossible 51). Although recognized as US citizens, many newly designated Mexican Americans faced immediate and sustained discrimination and loss of political and economic power throughout the nineteenth century, including diminished claims to land and constrained political participation in the US (D. Gutiérrez 22-8). Solidarity among Mexican Americans and their isolation from Anglo, US Americans also increased during this period, making Mexican Americans a recognizable community while also marking them as racial and cultural outsiders among Anglos. Yet, Mexican Americans—along with Mexican citizens—were crucial to the development of the nineteenth-century southwestern economy. Thus, while Anglo, US Americans ostracized many Mexican Americans, especially poorer people, they also recognized the need for labor. Labor needs coupled with minimal monitoring of the southern border allowed Mexican (im)migrants to easily enter and leave the US (whether to visit family or find seasonal employment). During this period, the US-Mexico border remained relatively open, movement across the border was not criminalized, and Mexicans and US Americans crossed with little fanfare. US mounted watchmen patrolled the border; however, patrol efforts were sporadic, underfunded, and the watchmen had limited power or authority. Yet, by the 1890s, Mexicans were not only entering the US for economic opportunities but fleeing their homes due to “draconian” land policies instituted by Mexican dictator Porfirio Díaz, with a steady stream continuing through the 1910s. (D Gutiérrez 39). And, by the early twentieth century, US political
and popular discourses constructed Mexican (im)migrants as a threat to the US nation-state.

The creation of the Border Patrol in 1924, mass removal of Mexicans and Mexican Americans through Depression-era deportation campaigns, the internment of Asians and Asian Americans during WWII, and Operation Wetback in 1954 all underscore dominant political and cultural beliefs that racial minorities and perceived foreigners constitute a threat against the US nation-state. Yet, in an effort to reform discriminatory US immigration policies, if not attitudes, the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 (also known as Hart-Celler Act) abolished the national origins quota system set in place by the 1921 Emergency Quota Act, seemingly commencing a new era for US immigration law. The 1921 legislation was a crucial tool for determining the composition of new US (im)migrants, as it favored those originating from Northern and Western Europe, while generally excluding people of Asian and African descent.

In place of the national origins quota, Hart-Celler created preference-based categories for relatives of US citizens, refugees, and skilled professionals (coded as skills deemed useful to the US). Hart-Cellar was less racially restrictive than previous US laws and policies, as it allowed immigrants from Asian nations, in particular, to enter beyond token numbers. Yet, gatekeeping’s racialized roots ensured even the more inclusive 1965 legislation furthered the racial status quo. The reunification preference category privileged (im)migrants with family already living in the US; due to a history of racially restrictive (im)migration laws, European (im)migrants overwhelmingly benefitted from this category (Lee 129). Hart-Cellar also imposed quotas on Western Hemisphere (im)migration for the first time and disbanded the Bracero Program—an agreement between the US and Mexico allowing Mexican nationals to seek seasonal agricultural work in the US. These decisions placed caps on Mexican (im)migrants, which has made “legal”
(im)migration from Mexico more difficult (Cerrutti and Massey 19) and inadvertently increased the number of “illegal” entries from Mexico (Ngai, Impossible 261). This overview of major US (im)migration laws and border management policies shows over a century’s worth of legislative actions that paved the way for the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, which also takes root in and perpetuates dominant racial logic. Further, IRCA and the other major legislative actions featured in this project reflect and reproduce US fears of “alien invaders” and each treats undocumented (im)migrants as “enemies who threaten the moral, cultural, and political fabric of the nation-state and therefore must be evicted, eliminated, or otherwise controlled” (Ono and Sloop 35).

IRCA emerged from a joint-Congressional effort to reduce illegal entry into the US while assessing the status of unauthorized (im)migrants living in the country. Previous (im)migration legislation focused primarily on the inclusion or exclusion of documented or authorized (im)migrants. In contrast, IRCA was “passed in order to control and deter illegal immigration to the United States,” according to US Citizenship and Immigration Services (Department of Homeland Security). IRCA paired restriction efforts with a legalization program offering amended status to qualified undocumented (im)migrants already living in the US. In doing so, the Act drew sharp lines between the undocumented population already living and working in the US (particularly those who could be “made legal”) and undocumented (im)migrants seeking to

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13 Cerrutti and Massey assert, “before 1965 countries in the Western Hemisphere were not subject to any quantitative restrictions on immigration. The old national-origins quotas were silent about immigration from Latin American [sic] and the Caribbean, and before the Hart-Celler Act, Mexicans could enter the United States in any number as long as they met certain qualitative criteria (having to do with health, fitness, and political affiliation)” (18-19).

14 IRCA contained four major provisions that help structure and enforce the divide between newly authorized immigrants and “illegals.” These provisions included allocating more monies to Border Patrol enforcement at the US southern border, enforcing sanctions against employers who knowingly hired undocumented workers, extending amnesty to qualified long-term undocumented residents, and offering a separate legalization program for undocumented agricultural workers.
enter. Without explicitly naming (im)migrants as a threat to US citizens, IRCA sought to minimize unauthorized entry into the US, while granting legal status to nearly 2.7 million previously undocumented people, including over two million Mexicans (Orrenius and Zavodny 437). Yet, the legalization program privileged male (im)migrants and created an unofficial gendered policy on citizenship. Noting these competing objectives and outcomes, split assessments of IRCA as “generous” and “exclusionary” are not surprising. Cerrutti and Massey have described the amnesty program as a means of securing “the acquiescence of Latino and civil rights groups” and the agricultural workers’ program as an effort for “securing support from agricultural growers in Texas and California” (19). Meanwhile, the Reagan administration and many civil rights groups lauded IRCA’s amnesty provision and legalization programs as a step toward racial diversity, inclusion, and fairness.

IRCA also reinforced political and cultural assessments of the contemporary US-Mexican border as a militarized site, thus depicting undocumented crossers as threats and targets to be neutralized. Under IRCA, “the Immigration Naturalization Service (INS) received a 50 percent budget increase to hire additional Border Patrol officers” (Cerrutti and Massey 20). The increased number of agents allowed for high profile Border Patrol offensives such as Operation Hold-the-Line (launched in El Paso, TX in 1993), Operation Gatekeeper (San Diego, CA in 1994), Operation Rio Grande (McAllen, TX in 1997), and Operation Safeguard (Nogales, AZ in 1999) and added to the militarization of the border thanks to the doubling of the enforcement budget between 1993 and 1997 (Orrenius 285). These Border Patrol offenses forced undocumented (im)migrants’ entry into the US out of urban spaces and into the desert. Pursuing alternative entry routes means (im)migrants walk through the desert for several days in order to reach their destination, which has made them more susceptible to exploitation, injury, and
death. These border security measures have also made it more difficult for (im)migrants to return to their country of origin, thus forcing many to remain in the US longer than originally planned while transforming “Mexican immigration from a circular movement of workers affecting three states into a national population of settled dependents scattered throughout the country” (Durand and Massey 12). Nonetheless, popular and political rhetoric vilifies undocumented Mexican (im)migrants as a mass of invaders, as seen by the rhetoric surrounding California Proposition 187, which supported attrition efforts that would force undocumented (im)migrants to leave the state by denying them access to social services. The condemnation of (im)migrants fails to account for US political decisions shaping their entry and time in the US, consideration of how exclusionary language marks (im)migrants as racial and national Others, or the effects of conflating (im)migrants with political terrorists.

National security concerns have linguistically transformed “law-breaking” undocumented (im)migrants into potential terrorists, with this conflation infiltrating federal law, government structure, and military decisions. Addressing the association between undocumented, criminals, and law-breakers, legal scholar Jennifer M. Chacón explains, “In contemporary discussions of policies aimed at removing ‘undesirable’ noncitizens, distinctions between undocumented migrants, ‘criminal aliens,’” and individuals who pose threats to national security are often blurred” (“Unsecured” 239). For example, the 2002 formation of Department of Homeland Security (DHS) contributed to representations of economic (im)migrants as political and

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15 Even noting the increased injury and mortality rates among (im)migrants, US Customs and Border Protection identified these operations as “an immediate success” (“Border Patrol History”). Though, Jonathan Xavier Inda argues these policies “[do] not mean the Border Patrol wants immigrants to die; it simply signifies that, in order to protect its population, the Border Patrol, and the federal government more generally, is willing to tolerate a few casualties. The biopolitical implication is that the state is making a decision on the value and nonvalue of life, distinguishing between those lives that deserve to be lived and those that can be disallowed to the point of death” (149).
potential terrorist threats, with DHS incorporating the responsibilities of the dissolved INS. The purview of DHS spans beyond (im)migration matters and “places all the major immigration-regulation responsibilities of the federal government alongside federal drug and criminal enforcement operations and a wide range of security, antiterrorism, and intelligence operations” (Kretsedemas and Brotherton, “Open” 25). The creation of DHS post-9/11 aligns (im)migration, antiterrorism, and intelligence operations, thus offering political support that the three are linked. Further, support for DHS and related legislative actions relies upon depictions of outsiders as threatening, and legal scholar John Tehranian asserts The War on Terror functions as a war against racialized Others. He writes, “The terrorists were, above all, racialized,” even though the attacks could have been framed “as the work of a group of anti-Americans, of frustrated young men, of the disenfranchised and socioeconomically disadvantaged, as Saudi Arabsians, or of Islamic radicals (with no specific racialized elements)” (266). The racialization of the 9/11 terrorists and fears about national security extend to the border and apply to brown-skinned Others entering the US via Mexico, thus justifying the militarized presence at the US-Mexico border and exclusion and expulsion of “national” Others. This is most pointedly demonstrated by the passage of the Secure Fence Act of 2006 (SFA), which codifies the accepted interconnectedness of (im)migration regulation and antiterrorism. Commenting on SFA, Philip Kretsedemas and David C. Brotherton argue the SFA “expanded the application of border

16 Commenting on the formation of DHS, scholar Karma R. Chávez indicates “there has never been a documented instance of a terrorist attack against the United States using the Southern border for entry. The rhetoric pervaded the national imaginary, nevertheless, and the office of Homeland Security was created in 2001” (55). This point again underscores the power of myths, even when refuted by evidence.

17 The following is a select list of US federal legislation passed in the first decade of the twenty-first century that contributed to a culture of fear and suspicion concerning those entering the US without authorization. The far-reaching USA Patriot Act, passed in 2001 with little debate and minimal opposition, serves as a legal cornerstone of post-9/11 legislation and establishes the relationship between security and fear. Additional pieces of legislation include the Aviation and Transportation Security Act (2001); Enhanced Border Security and Visa Entry Reform Act of 2001; Homeland Security Act of 2002; REAL ID Act of 2005; and the Secure Fence Act of 2006.
control technology, increased the number of border control agents, and authorized the construction of additional fencing along the US-Mexico border” in order to protect citizens and ensure their security (“Annotated” 379). In chapter three, I position the SFA as part of a larger twenty-first-century political and racialized nation-making project.

Although the bulk of this overview focuses on federal (im)migration policies, state and local agencies also play a role in shaping the political landscape on (im)migration. In the final chapter, I examine Arizona’s SB 1070, also known as the “Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act,” a strict, anti-illegal (im)migration measure signed into law in 2010. The architects of SB 1070 designed the legislation to function as a race-neutral policy aimed at protecting Arizonans’ personal safety and economic security by removing all “illegal aliens” from the state. The legislation, however, gives law enforcement officers the authority to determine a person’s (im)migration status when “reasonable suspicion exists” that the person is “unlawfully present in the United States” (SB 1070). “Reasonable suspicion” is a vague term, but supports argue SB 1070 does not overtly target or exclude a particular group based upon racial identity, unlike nineteenth- and twentieth-century (im)migration laws such as the Chinese Exclusion Act or the 1924 Johnson-Reed Act. However, popular and cultural assumptions governed by an exclusionary racial logic that has permeated US (im)migration laws also infiltrates SB 1070. The legislation marks brown-skinned people as racial Others and national outsiders and tacitly supports racial profiling, thus inviting “reasonable suspicion” they are unlawfully present and do not belong in the US. Arizona’s SB 1070, alongside other US (im)migration laws, advances the US nation-state’s racial formation projects.

Cultural Texts as Sites of Inquiry

Returning to Molina’s understanding of social structures as “the ‘scaffolding’ of race”
and cultural representation as “more about the way we see and experience race,” (How Race 3), I place (im)migrant-themed cultural texts at the center of investigation to understand how dominant contemporary US Americans—namely white, English-speaking men—see race post-IRCA. The pairing of cultural and legal texts sets the stage for identifying and evaluating how structures and images use race to sustain inequality and injustice in their treatment of undocumented (im)migrants. As part of public discourse, cultural texts on (im)migration can shape ideas and perspectives about undocumented (im)migration and (im)migrants. Literary scholar Jodi Melamed argues, “culture does not just have the ability to mold human behaviors and attitudes, rather culture is a name for a dynamic-moving base of epistemology, knowledge, social relations, and material forces interlinked and in contention that sediment heterogeneous and uneven experiences of the everyday” (99). Throughout this work, I evaluate the way cultural texts, their producers, and cultural critics participate in the production of knowledge about undocumented (im)migrants. When cultural texts make claims that (im)migrants threaten or contribute to the US nation-state, they offer millions of consumers who are largely unfamiliar with the complexities of undocumented (im)migration “an explanatory framework” and rationale for (im)migrants’ inclusion or exclusion from the US nation-state and ultimately transform “a complex problem into a simpler, coherent, and intelligible whole” (Capetillo-Ponce 315).

I have selected works from different genres in order to interrogate the breadth of cultural texts focused on undocumented (im)migration and to evaluate how they set the stage for or respond to existing political and social ideologies about undocumented (im)migration and

18 Filmmaker Jackson Katz insists “It’s really important to remember that there’s nothing natural about images. They don’t just come about by accident. They’re made by someone.” Katz notes that men have primarily been “the authors and creators of [US] popular culture” and that images reflect “what’s going on in [their] psyches…what we’re seeing, in part, is their pathologies and anxieties being played out on the screen” (Tough Guise).
(im)migrants. These texts, named and discussed in greater detail in the chapter outlines below, include documentaries, novels, Hollywood films, and photographic images. The diverse case studies/genres are, of course, a small sampling of available (im)migrant-themed cultural texts; however, they show how US legal and cultural texts use racial scripts and identity categories beyond race to minimize the importance of race/racism in (im)migration-themed discourse and political decisions concerning undocumented (im)migration.

The featured cultural texts are produced primarily by English-speaking, white, male US citizens, some of whom oppose undocumented (im)migration and others who support open border policies (often the lines are blurry). Each of the texts features representation of undocumented (im)migrants, but the final products are not edited, framed, or produced by (im)migrants. Taking cues from communications scholar Catherine R. Squires, I explore “how communicators work to (re)create and/or re-envision a sense of community, inspire (or reject) new vehicles for multicultural inclusion, and confront the facts of persistent racial inequalities in the United States” (2). By pairing mainstream texts with independent or small-scale cultural texts, and discussing texts featuring US citizens alongside those depicting undocumented (im)migrants, I demonstrate how both citizens and noncitizens (the latter often possessing limited political or cultural power within the US) frame and influence the discourse on undocumented (im)migration. Finally, I also selected a broad range of primary sources from various genres because I see US (im)migration discourse infiltrating a wide assortment of cultural texts, from the popular and mainstream to niche markets. The variety of texts and forums

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19 Due to the wide range of sources, I use mixed methods as I investigate my primary sources, including textual, visual, and discourse analysis.

20 Most of the primary sources featured in this project focus on Mexican undocumented (im)migrants. However, a few sources treat all Latino (im)migrants as a homogenous group, lumping together or treating as interchangeable persons from Mexico and various Latin American nations.
ensures (im)migration-discourse reaches a broad US audience. And, when conveyed through a medium such as documentary, the (im)migration-themed messages are marked as inclusive, fair, balanced, and even progressive. While a few sources are outwardly liberal or progressive in their treatment and understanding of (im)migrants, often in recognizing human security as a route to national security, they still frequently subscribe to and perpetuate racial logic similar to overtly anti-(im)migrant texts, blurring the lines between “pro” and “anti” thought.

**Guiding Theories**

Several theoretical perspectives provide the groundwork for my treatment and analysis of race, nation, gender, class, and (im)migration throughout this project. Three core philosophies govern these theoretical positions: rooting race in an intersectional analysis, treating race as relational and a social construct, and evaluating texts within their specific historical and political circumstances. Theoretical perspectives such as multidimensionality theory and multiracial feminism, alongside Natalia Molina’s work on racial scripts and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva’s study on color-blind racism, shape my treatment of racialized inequality in historical and contemporary US America. And, Lawrence Grossberg, Stuart Hall, and Raymond Williams’ arguments for conjunctural knowledge underscore the importance of assessing texts within their specific historical context. These theorists and theories serve as the backbone for my analysis of race and racism in contemporary (im)migration-themed discourse.

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21 For example, there are dozens of US produced documentaries on undocumented (im)migration. Derek Paget constructs a list of conventional tenets of documentary. He names the following as defining theoretical elements: documentary appears in the realm of non-fiction with a heavy emphasis on fact; it is seen as reasonable, rational, authentic, and objective; however, it may display a *partial* truth. In terms of content, documentary relies upon data and current affairs, and the content should favor public interests over private. The genre also incorporates practices such as research, unrehearsed events, commentary or statements, real-world individuals, montage, captions, natural light, and location sounds. Finally, in terms of the audience, documentary should inspire belief, convergent thinking, comprehension, and distance (7).
Through this project, I argue many (im)migration-themed cultural and legal texts treat
gender, class, and national identities in isolation, which suppresses the role of race and racism in
(im)migration discourse. Therefore, multidimensionality theory and multiracial feminism work
in tandem as guiding philosophies for this project, as both prioritize an intersectional framework.
Legal scholars Ann C. McGinley and Frank Rudy Cooper assert multidimensionality theory
recognizes identities are always contextually specific and intertwined, and thus “race, gender,
class, sexual orientation, and other discrete identities are actually imbricated within one another
and cannot be understood in isolation” (7).22 Similarly, multiracial feminism, “examines the
simultaneity of systems in shaping women’s experience and identity,” and, as feminist scholars
Maxine Baca Zinn and Bonnie Thornton Dill note, “race, class, gender, and sexuality are not
reducible to individual attributes to be measured and assessed for their separate contribution in
explaining given social outcomes” (107). The “simultaneity of systems” is a key concept guiding
my project, even though it seemingly runs counter to my organization and chapter structure
(outlined below). While I examine class, gender and nation as separate entities, I strategically do
so in order to demonstrate how race, racial logics, and racism are obfuscated in contemporary
(im)migration discourse. I believe race, gender, class, and nationality should be thought of as
interconnected identity categories, and I show and assess this entanglement in the final chapter
and project conclusion.

Adding to the intersectional framework advanced by multidimensionality and multiracial
feminist theories, Molina’s concept of racial scripts offers the language and framework for

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22 McGinley and Cooper indicate that multidimensionality theory derives from feminist theory, feminist legal
theory, and critical race theory (2). Explaining critical race theory, they note “One of the major tenets...is that
identities are ‘socially constructed.’ The meanings of race do not derive from nature, but nurture; people are trained
to associate particular characteristics with particular phenotypes” (6).
treating race as relational and examining how dominant racial logic has been applied across time and space and has shaped US (im)migration policies and discourse. Molina defines racial scripts as the “attitudes, practices, customs, policies, and laws” that link the lives of racialized groups (How Race 7), including the dominant narratives and ideologies stereotypically attributed the bodies, histories, and capabilities of US Americans of color. She argues “society is predisposed (consciously or not) to utilize historical experience and stereotypes of past groups to define and circumscribe the place and role of future members of U.S. society” (How Race 16). Historical racial scripts designating African Americans as biologically and culturally inferior have been used to justify slavery and Jim Crow segregation, deny access to the housing market and workforce, or rationalize inequalities in educational outcomes or treatment with the legal system. Further, African Americans have been branded as a threat to white purity and a white nation.23 Similar scripts appear in characterizations of Asians and Asian Americans as the “yellow peril,” an economic threat to white citizens and white women’s virtue.24 The construction of “non-white” foreigners and US citizens as a threat to white, US Americans shows “the ways in which the lives of racialized groups are linked across time and space and thereby affect one another, even when they do not directly cross paths” (Molina, How Race 6). This historical and intersectional framework similarly reveals how racial scripts have affected perceptions and treatments of Mexicans (and often Latinos more broadly), including being designated as

23 Martha Hodes’ White Women, Black Men (1997), George Lipsitz’s The Possessive Investment in Whiteness (1998), and Helen Heran Jun’s Race for Citizenship (2011) all offer discussions of historical and contemporary racial scripts marking African Americans as a threat to white purity and security.

24 These scripts have held considerable cultural clout since the nineteenth century and were codified through the passage of federal laws such as the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act and the 1917 Asiatic Barred Zone Act. For a more sustained analysis on constructions of Asians and Asian Americans as “the yellow peril,” see Helen Heran Jun’s Race for Citizenship, Sunaina Maira’s “Racial Profiling” in the War on Terror,” and Min Zhou and J.V. Gatewood’s “Transforming Asian America.”
economic burdens, health threats, and more recently security risks. Further, racial scripts targeting Mexicans show how Mexicans, Hispanics, and Latinos have been marked as racial groups through US racial logic, even though “Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin” is treated as category separate from race in official US classifications, including the US Census.\(^{25}\)

Molina’s racial scripts concept paired with Eduardo Bonilla-Silva’s work on racial inequality in the present day shows how historically racist ideologies manifest in the contemporary US. Bonilla-Silva documents the ways in which many white, US Americans embrace and engage in racist discourse while arguing for the existence of a color-blind society.\(^{26}\) He argues whites justify racial inequality in the US by employing frames such as cultural racism, which “relies on culturally based arguments…to explain the standing of minorities in society” and justify the racial status quo (28).\(^{27}\) Bonilla-Silva’s study and framework are useful to my project because he establishes how post-racial rhetoric is used to obscure and refute racial inequalities in contemporary US. And, I use the cultural racism frame to argue that exclusionary (im)migration discourse emphasizes economic and cultural stereotypes to explain why (im)migrants do not belong in the US, therefore muting the role of racial logic. My work also builds upon Bonilla-Silva’s approach by considering how sexism, classism, and xenophobia shape so-called color-blind thinking and post-racist rhetoric.

In addition to theoretical approaches on race, I turn to Lawrence Grossberg, Stuart Hall, and Raymond Williams’ respective works on conjuncture in cultural studies as a means of

\(^{25}\) The 2010 US Census indicates Hispanic, Latino, and Spanish “origins are not races.” Noting the disparity between official racial groups and US racial logic, Mary Romero characterizes Latinos as a “racial ethnic group,” because their experience in the US “is a racial one,” even though Spanish/Hispanic origin is treated as separate from race in official US categories (xiv-xv).

\(^{26}\) Bonilla-Silva complicates this argument, noting that some people of color also embrace color-blind discourse.

\(^{27}\) Examples of cultural racism include: “Mexicans do not put emphasis on education” and “blacks have too many babies” (Bonilla-Silva 28).
evaluating comparative work across contexts and the relationship of cultural texts to the context in which they exist. In “Cultural Studies and Its Theoretical Legacies,” Hall emphasizes the necessity of conjunctural knowledge, or the knowledge situated in and applicable to specific historical and political circumstances. Raymond Williams also addresses the necessity of grounding cultural studies in historical and politically specific terms; he asserts, “you cannot understand an intellectual or artistic project without also understanding its formation” (151). Grossberg reflects on context too, though in arenas outside of and seemingly unrelated to culture: “Cultural studies work has to be interdisciplinary, because contexts—and even culture—cannot be analyzed in purely cultural terms; understanding contexts and, within them, specific cultural formations, requires looking at culture’s relations to everything that is not culture” (24). The emphasis on context and conjunctural knowledge in Cultural Studies articulated by scholars such as Grossberg, Hall, and Williams shapes the structure of my study and analysis of the selected texts. Each chapter features a US (im)migration law from the post-Civil Rights era period. The laws appear in chronological order, covering a timeframe from 1986 to 2010, thus allowing for a portrait of contemporary (im)migration-based legal discourse. Connecting cultural texts—documentary film, narrative fiction, and photography—to the laws illuminates the historical and political circumstances supporting the formation of these texts and allows for a critical examination of US racial logics have infiltrated post-IRCA (im)migration discourse.

This study is also shaped by my own knowledge and positionality as a white, female, English-speaking, US-born citizen who was educated in the US. My readings of the featured legal and cultural texts are partial and situated, based upon my social identities. As Squires reminds us, “social identities such as age, gender, race, class, sexuality and their intersections impact how we respond to or evaluate a text; we form ‘interpretive communities’ linked to our
social identities” (134). Although I approach the texts from a feminist and anti-racist standpoint—resisting and challenging the racial scripts infusing documents produced primarily by white, male, English-speaking US citizens—my privilege and vantage points as a white, educated, US citizen ultimately influences my readings and analysis.

Chapter Outlines

This project is divided into four chapters that focus on the language and images US cultural texts and legal actions project about undocumented (im)migration and (im)migrants. US (im)migration-themed legislative actions create, extend, and validate many stereotypes and myths about undocumented (im)migration and (im)migrants. For example, the Secure Fence Act of 2006 conflates economic (im)migrants with political terrorists by drawing upon racial scripts marking brown-skinned foreigners as threatening. On the subject of myths, legal scholar Dorothy Roberts argues, “Myths are more than made-up stories. They are also firmly held beliefs that represent and attempt to explain what we perceive to be the truth. They can become more credible than reality, holding fast even in the face of airtight statistics and rational argument to the contrary” (8). By using class- and nation- and gender-based ideologies to perpetuate a series of myths about undocumented (im)migrants, legislation such as IRCA, Proposition 187, The Secure Fence Act of 2006, and Arizona SB 1070 suppress the role of race in calls for exclusion and expulsion. Further, these policies and laws set the stage for (or reinforce) cultural and popular discourses that convey similar myths to the broader public.

Each chapter examines a different strategy for suppressing the role of race in policing the

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28 My analysis of the legal texts magnifies specific issues (e.g. gender and sexuality). However, sexism, class, and nationalism all exist in US (im)migration discourse across the project timeline, though at times an issue may be more pronounced or fade to the backdrop.
US-Mexico border and those who cross it. Specifically, I evaluate how (im)migration-based narratives use gender and sexuality, class, nation, and localism to minimize the racial logic and white privilege that propels US (im)migration discourse. I further, in each chapter, I pair seemingly pro- and anti-(im)migrant texts to underscore how “both sides have a vested interest in ‘creating’ and ‘recreating’ the border” (Sánchez, Becoming 39). The texts produced from a US pro-(im)migrant stance convey different visions of the border region and US (im)migration policies than texts produced by anti-(im)migrant voices, though both sides utilize race, gender, class, and nation in shaping their visions of and relationship to the US-Mexico border region. And, both sides tends to mute racial logic in favor of narratives rooted in gender, class, nation, and localism.

In chapter one, I argue demographic changes resulting from IRCA, combined with an anti-female and neoconservative cultural shift, contributed to a contemporary US (im)migration discourse that scrutinizes bodies, gender performances, and sexuality, whether calling for (im)migrants’ inclusion or expulsion. This chapter examines how IRCA’s patriarchal depiction of (im)migrants contributes to border narratives using gender as the cornerstone of (im)migration discourse. Using Chris Burgard’s documentary Border: The Divide Between the American Dream and the American Nightmare (2008) and Tommy Davis’ documentary Mojados: Through the Night (2004), I show how cultural texts draw upon characterizations of Mexican women,

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29 My work focuses on US racial logics, including the ways that racism and white privilege intersect. As historian Vicki L. Ruiz argues, “Pointing only to racism as an all-encompassing construct ignores white privilege and its shortsighted historical memory” (379).

30 Sociologist Elena R. Gutiérrez addresses some of the popular narratives that circulated around Mexican women’s bodies during the 1970s. These include: pregnant Mexican women crossing into the US, sometimes while in labor, to have their children (390) and taxpayers covering the cost of “undeserving Mexican women” giving birth in the US, meaning the child would be a US American and use social services intended for “real” citizens (391). Additionally, scholars Denise A. Segura and Patricia Zavella have argued that Mexican women’s “reproductive bodies are represented as hostile and foreign, threatening the social safety net and thus the well-being of the nation. Such representations constitute a form of social violence” (11).
their bodies, reproduction, and sexuality as either threatening or victimized. In doing so, I point to the interconnectedness of sexism and racism in US (im)migration discourse; IRCA functions to “hide” racism and xenophobia in plain sight through less controversial acts of misogyny, thereby underscoring the importance of intersectional analysis to excavate such latent biases. I argue anti-(im)migrant reformers focus on gender, sex, and reproduction as seemingly logical reasons for excluding (im)migrants and regulating the border. Meanwhile, pro-(im)migrant advocates employ surprisingly similar sex-based rationale, though for the purpose of embracing male (im)migrants while scapegoating female (im)migrants or male (im)migrants’ wives who remain in their home nation. Both camps draw upon historical racial and gender scripts, signifying the post-IRCA denigration of women and women’s bodies is part of a new stage in the nation’s larger racial formation project.

In the second chapter, I evaluate the role of economics and class in justifying (im)migrants’ inclusion or exclusion from the US nation-state. Calls for excluding and expelling poor, brown, unskilled (im)migrants, as covertly directed by California’s Proposition 187, play upon popular fears that (im)migrants abuse US social services and threaten the prosperity of US Americans. When political and cultural texts frame (im)migration as a predominantly economic issue, the role of race and racial logic in designating “worth” can be disguised. I refer to this disguise as the “economics not race” logic, and I highlight how economic and racial representations intersect in (im)migration-themed discourse, which Omi and Winant argue allows for analysis of “racial dynamics…as determinants of class relationships…not as mere consequences” (34). I also show how cultural texts extend, reinforce, or reinterpret the “economics not race” logic advocated within dominant popular and political discourse surrounding 187. The texts—both narrative fiction—include Joel Schumacher’s filmic crime
drama, *Falling Down* (1993) and T.C. Boyle’s novel *The Tortilla Curtain* (1995). My evaluation of economic-based discourse in (im)migrant-themed texts shows how an individual’s worth and contribution are monetized and racialized by both anti- and pro-(im)migrant perspectives, with undocumented (im)migrants deemed worthless and an economic liability or crucial to the US economy and the nation’s commitment to (racial) diversity and inclusion.

The third chapter discusses the intersections between nation and race in (im)migrant-themed discourse. I pair the photographic archive The Border Film Project (BFP) with the Secure Fence Act of 2006 in order to show how both cultural and legal texts use nationalism and patriotism to divert attention from racial scripts embedded in contemporary US (im)migration rhetoric. The BFP features photographs taken by the Minutemen—a US-based, self-appointed border defense group—and undocumented (im)migrants entering the US via the southern border. Anti-(im)migrant nationalist rhetoric portrays (im)migrants’ citizenship status and national identity as the basis for their exclusion from the nation, while emphasizing US citizens’ commitment to supporting and protecting their nation. Yet, the logic constructing (im)migrants as outsiders who threaten the US relies upon racial scripts marking Mexican (im)migrants as suspicious law-breakers and criminals. The exclusionary racial logic embedded in BFP anti-(im)migrant discourse also appears in the Secure Fence Act of 2006, with race-based exclusion repackaged as national protection. The act authorized the construction of fencing and security improvements along the US-Mexico border in order to “protect the American people…[and] make our borders more secure” (“Fact Sheet”). Meanwhile, pro-(im)migrant viewpoints, as conveyed through (im)migrants’ photographic images, also advance nation-based ideologies by showing how (im)migrants dress and behave like US Americans. This approach normalizes (im)migrants’ presence in the US through claims of belonging and affinity, rather than
acknowledging or condemning US racial logic and hierarchies.

In the fourth chapter, I discuss the emergence of “localism” in (im)migration-themed discourse. This final chapter shows how legal and cultural texts use the concept of “local” identities—rooted in gender, class, and nation—to minimize the role of race in (im)migration-themed discourse. I argue contemporary US laws such as Arizona’s SB 1070 and cultural texts depict undocumented (im)migration via the US-Mexico border as a transnational issue that both the US and Mexican federal governments have ineffectively handled, thus forcing local peoples to take action and protect familial and communal welfare. This chapter features two documentaries—Kevin Knoblock’s *Border War: The Battle over Illegal Immigration* (2006) and Roy Germano’s *The Other Side of Immigration* (2009)—alongside SB 1070. I argue anti-(im)migrant US localism constructs (im)migrants as unsuitable community members by depicting them as threat to the US border region’s individuals, families, and communities. This stance claims to advocate for and protect the economic, political, and social identities of local inhabitants, but draws upon racial scripts marking (im)migrants as inferior and unwelcome outsiders. Meanwhile, pro-(im)migrant Mexican localism asserts that (im)migrants leave their homes in order to protect the economic, political, and social identities that comprise their local communities, even if that means facing racial discrimination in the US. While pro-(im)migrant localism tentatively acknowledges racial discrimination, this stance concentrates on justifying (im)migrants’ reasons for leaving Mexico and making them sympathetic and relatable subjects, and thus minimizes the role of race and racism in (im)migration-themed discourse.

“Threatening Immigrants” begins to fill the shortage of culture-oriented studies on dominant US discourse and representations of undocumented (im)migrants, as I address the importance of cultural texts in affirming or resisting the US nation-states’ racial projects.
Remaining in conversation with the larger body of scholarship on US (im)migration history and the racialization of undocumented (im)migrants, I use contemporary US cultural texts conveying anti- and pro-(im)migrant ideologies to show how racial logics are produced, challenged, undermined, and negotiated.
CHAPTER 1: THE USE OF SEX AND GENDER IN POST-IRCA BORDER NARRATIVES

The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA) emerged from a joint-Congressional effort to reduce illegal entry into the US while assessing the status of unauthorized (im)migrants living in the country. The act paired restriction efforts with a legalization program offering amended status to qualified undocumented (im)migrants. IRCA mandated increased funding and support for US-Mexico border enforcement, enacted employer-based penalties to halt “illegal” (im)migrant hires, and extended legal status to nearly three million people (IRCA). Ultimately, the legalization program directly benefited men, as they comprised a majority of the pre-IRCA unauthorized population. Meanwhile, as explained in the next section, the number of female (im)migrants unexpectedly increased post-IRCA, placing a spotlight on the gendered nature of (im)migration. I argue the demographic changes resulting from an increased number of female (im)migrants, combined with an anti-female and neoconservative cultural shift, contributed to an (im)migration discourse that scrutinizes bodies, gender performances, and sexuality, whether calling for (im)migrants’ inclusion or expulsion.

Cultural treatments of undocumented (im)migration undergo a shift at the level of language and representation post-IRCA. The proliferation of androcentric and misogynist rhetoric in defense strategies, anti-(im)migrant discourse, and (im)migrant-themed cultural texts reflects this shift. I address the prevalence of sex-based discourse in (im)migrant-themed texts in order to show how gender operates within border narratives. Selected cultural texts include Tommy Davis’ documentary Mojados (2004) and Chris Burgard’s documentary Border (2008).

31 Some qualifications include: proof the applicant lived in the US since January 1, 1982; no criminal record; registration with the Selective Service (reinforcing the focus on men); and a demonstrated knowledge of the English language and US history.
These texts display evidence of sex- and gender-based ideologies in the (im)migration debate. Further, each cultural text participates in post-IRCA (im)migration discussions citing sex and gender as a means for exclusion while suppressing the role of race. This chapter examines border narratives post IRCA that reflect the legislation’s androcentric character and use gender as the cornerstone of (im)migration discourse. Further, in the tradition of Michael Omi and Howard Winant, I argue post-IRCA US-based (im)migration discourse utilizes gender- and sex-based “code words.” The code words function to disguise racial motivations for (im)migrants’ inclusion or exclusion, muddling color-blind racism and imperialism embedded in these racial motivations, and reflect a larger cultural and rhetorical shift rooted in anti-feminist backlash.

**IRCA: Subtle Androcentrism and Anti-Racist Claims**

IRCA made it possible for undocumented (im)migrants living in the US to apply for legal status, but the androcentric legislation favored male (im)migrants. IRCA granted residency status and accompanying rights to millions of undocumented people; however, it also communicated who the US recognized and valued as workers, contributors, and acceptable members of the society. Granting residency to (im)migrants who had already been living in the US ensured more men benefited from IRCA, as the undocumented population was largely comprised of men. Sociologist Denise A. Segura and anthropologist Patricia Zavella specify, “Prior to IRCA, undocumented women comprised about one quarter of all migrants. During the transition and post-IRCA periods, that figure rose to one third” (7). Further, IRCA offered the possibility of

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32 Omi and Winant argue the New Right employs “code words” or “non-racial rhetoric used to disguise racial issues” as means of rearticulating racial ideologies in order to challenge political and social gains by minorities while seemingly rejecting overt racism (118).

33 Their conclusions are based upon the findings of Douglas S. Massey, Jorge Durand, and Nolan J. Malone. Commenting on post-IRCA (im)migration demographics, Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo indicates that “women may even compose a majority of the Mexican undocumented immigrant population” (26), and, although using a different metric, George J. Sánchez places the overall figures since 1960 even higher: “there has been a radical shift in
amnesty to (im)migrants who could successfully document their US employment and residency histories. Section 245A of the Act reads: “The Attorney General shall adjust the status of an alien to that of an alien lawfully admitted for temporary residence if the alien meets the following requirements,” some of which include timely application, proof of continuous unlawful residence since 1982, continuous physical presence since the enactment of the law, and proof “he” is admissible as an (im)migrant (36-37). The demand for formal evidence or documentation disadvantaged unauthorized female (im)migrants “who largely worked in the informal sector, and favored men, who were more likely to have formal employment and thus were able to document their status” (Segura and Zavella 6-7). Although the act does not contain overt sex-based clauses or restrictions on who may earn legal status, it uses “he” as presumably gender neutral-language, exposing how “the power of ‘legalization’ is closely linked to masculinity” (Boehm 80).34 The legislation’s androcentric parameters and understanding of labor ensured men were more likely be judged as acceptable legal residents, contributors to US society, and, as a result, granted legal status. IRCA not only privileged male workers, as other scholars have articulated, but also made female (im)migrants invisible or marked them as less desirable, unlikely to contribute to the economy, and, as a result, devalued them. Although IRCA unduly benefitted undocumented men over their female counterparts, its passage inadvertently allowed more women to enter and work in the US. The increase of woman (im)migrants, particularly from Mexico and Central American nations, has been referred to as the “feminization of migration.” The post-IRCA surge in female (im)migrants to the US stems immigration flows into this country from Latin America and Asia by gender, so that over half of all immigrants, both legal and illegal, now are women” (“Race” 20).

34 Favoring male (im)migrants may have been unintentional, but it remains an unsurprising consequence of the male privilege embodied by IRCA’ co-authors Alan Simpson (WY) and Romano Mazzoli (KY).
from women joining their husbands, fathers, and other male relatives who gained legal status due to IRCA. Consequently, female family members attain what I call secondary access to the US, either entering by petition of newly naturalized male relatives (an unintended consequence of IRCA) or crossing without documentation for the purpose of joining family already in the US. Both show and contribute to a gender hierarchy, even as individual women may have benefitted from the Act’s androcentrism. Another unintended consequence of IRCA’s implementation was that women’s irregular or unreported employment in the US generally benefitted (im)migrant women workers. The Act’s employer sanctions targeted employers in the public rather than domestic sphere. As mentioned above, women living in the US prior to IRCA were less likely than their male counterparts to gain formalized public-sector employment or be able to prove long-term informal service. Because women were more likely than men to secure domestic employment, the employer sanctions affected female workers less drastically (Hondagneu-Sotelo 26-27). In sum, IRCA not only changed the composition of the undocumented population, its passage also challenged widespread views of undocumented (im)migrants as a predominantly male cohort, and contributed to the overt use of sex- and gender-based rationale supporting (im)migrants’ exclusion from the nation.

Post-IRCA, both pro- and anti-(im)migrant camps employ sex-based language and logic to disparage undocumented female (im)migrants, their bodies, and their presence in the US. Anti-(im)migrant camps express concern over the new wave of (im)migrants seeking to benefit from IRCA (namely wives, sisters, and daughters) and their use/abuse of US social services. This discourse draws upon the “feminization of migration” and historical and contemporary racial scripts denigrating female (im)migrants as hyper-fertile women who birth “anchor babies” and
exploit public and social services designed for citizens. Rather than articulating blatantly racist rhetoric, they anchor their criticism, distrust, and desire to exclude (im)migrants in sexism and misogyny (and skillfully disguised racism). Moving away from race-based exclusionary language and logic suggests those invested in curtailing unauthorized (im)migration are mindful of public perception and seek to avoid accusations of racial bigotry in an effort to make their stance more appealing to the average citizen. In turn, they use sex-based logic to rationalize (im)migrants’ exclusion. Anti-(im)migrant groups appear to understand racism as less palatable and more egregious than sexism and also fail to recognize their interconnectedness. Meanwhile, some pro-(im)migrant advocates rallied around (male) (im)migrants in an effort to “normalize” this cohort among US Americans. However, in heralding male (im)migrants as family providers and the embodiment of patriarchal masculinity, this discourse casts non-(im)migrating women as the impetus behind the men’s (im)migration and thus responsible for any problems attributed to their presence in the US.

The suppression of race-based exclusionary logic in favor of gender-based rationale was buttressed by IRCA’s legalization programs. Mexican (im)migrants made up two-thirds of the previously undocumented cohort who gained legal residence as a result of IRCA, and closed-border advocates point to the admission of Mexicans as a sign of their commitment to racial inclusivity, as nearly “2.3 million Mexican undocumented immigrants applied for legal status under one of IRCA’s programs (Hondagneu-Sotelo 26). According to this position, while IRCA passed in an effort to “control and deter illegal immigration to the United States” (USCIS),

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35 The terms anchor babies did not regularly appear in print until the mid-1990s; however, it aligns with other pejorative terminology such as “pregnant pilgrim”: “the ever-present hyper-fertile immigrant woman crossing the border to secure free prenatal care, American citizenship for her children, and the chance to live on the public dole” (E. Gutiérrez 391).
36 IRCA granted legal status to nearly 2.7 million previously undocumented people, including over two million Mexicans (Orrenius and Zavodny 437).
these programs exemplified the country’s stated commitment to racial inclusiveness and paved the way for political and cultural denials that racism undergirds US (im)migration law and discourse. Post-IRCA anti-(im)migrant discourse from groups such as the Minutemen Civil Defense Corps relies upon IRCA’s extension of amnesty and the “browning” of the US “legal” population to demonstrate resistance to undocumented (im)migration is not rooted in racism. In an effort to demonstrate seemingly anti-racist impulses, anti-(im)migrant rhetoric significantly departed from the race-based exclusion common in previous generations. For example, a member of the MCDC leadership asserts, if volunteers “start talking bigotry on the line, they’re gone” (Border). In its place, these groups adopted a gender-specific rationale for the exclusion and deportation of undocumented (im)migrants crossing the US-Mexico border. For example, suggesting “people from Mexico don’t have pre-natal care…so they walk across the border for it and get it for free” depicts Mexican women as hyper-fertile women who abuse US medical services intended for citizens, which may lead to the collapse of medical providers (Border). The turn to anti-female discourse still utilizes racist rhetoric, but it is couched in sexism, misogyny, and narratives about females, their reproductive bodies, and their (potential) children as threatening. This focus minimizes charges of racism, while still constructing (im)migrants as an economic, social, and cultural threat to the US, and thus justifies the exclusion or expulsion from the nation.

**Sexism to Veil Racism, Post-IRCA**

In the contemporary period, the female body and women’s sexuality remain entrenched in border defense concerns. The surge of female (im)migrants post-IRCA contributed to a heightened awareness of the gendered nature of (im)migration and opened up a space for expressions of anti-female rhetoric. This speech continues the historical pattern of anti-female
border discourse, which I will outline in the next section, but anti-(im)migrant groups employed it in new ways during the 1990s and into the twenty-first century. Post-IRCA border defense rhetoric manifests in three specific ways, including an anti-female border climate, naming female (im)migrants as a threat to the US, and espousing protectionist narratives directed at both US American and foreign women (which seemingly contradicts the other rhetorical strategies).

Together, these border defense strategies position (im)migrant women as helpless victims of gender-based violence, while also suggesting (im)migrant women are responsible for the physical and verbal violence they incur. Blaming women (im)migrants (along with their children and gender non-conforming men) for the deterioration and overuse of US social services provides anti-(im)migrant groups a specific target (i.e. here is the problem) while not outwardly denigrating a particular racial, ethnic, or national population. Because women and children exist within all communities and populations, blaming them allows anti-(im)migrant groups to focus on population increases and the impact undocumented “invaders” have on US citizens while evading accusations of race- or nation-based exclusion. Sex-based discrimination serves as a useful strategy for distancing anti-(im)migrant rhetoric from charges of racism, because exclusion appears to focus on US citizens’ needs and access to social services rather than on expulsion of persons seen as racially undesirable. This framework centers on the needs of US citizens, positioning anti-(im)migrants as advocates and above racial frays, rather than bigots.

Anti-female narratives continue to thrive as part of a border defense strategy that downplays explicit racism as a means for exclusion and, instead, relies upon the degradation and regulation of (im)migrants’ bodies and sexuality. Further, anti-female narratives are also employed by seemingly pro-(im)migrant sources in order to justify male (im)migrants’ unauthorized entry and even validate them as providers and protectors. Although the selected
cultural texts differ in their surface-level treatment of undocumented (im)migration, I use the
documentaries to show how both sides of the (im)migration debate scrutinize the female body
and question women’s presence and safety in the borderlands. These tactics use the body to
represent women as out of place in the borderlands and to show how female (im)migrants fail to
assimilate (do not understand cultural norms and responsibilities). Meanwhile, the texts lionize
male (im)migrants as hard-working providers, while representing women and children as the
cause of men’s unauthorized entry into the US and thus the appropriate targets of the public’s
ire.37

Both pro- and anti-(im)migrant positions articulate prejudices and biases against women.
Cultural ideas surrounding sex, gender, and sexuality appear in (im)migrant-themed texts—
validating men, denigrating women, and perpetuating traditional sex and gender roles. These
cultural ideas draw upon historical racial and gender scripts, signifying the post-IRCA
denigration of women and women’s bodies is part of the nation’s larger racial project.38 Because
“race is a matter of both social structure and cultural representation” (Omi and Winant 56), I
chart the historical and structural inequalities that produced “racial scripts” targeting women of
color before engaging with how these patterns are reproduced and reinterpreted in post-IRCA
(im)migration-themed cultural texts.

Racial Scripts Targeting Women

Negative characterizations of Mexican women, their bodies, reproduction, and sexuality
point to the interconnectedness of sexism and racism. Historically, Mexican women’s sexuality

37 The cultural texts, to various degrees, praise male (im)migrants as providers and protectors in order to make them
more sympathetic and less threatening (seen as strong, stoic, good workers) to US audiences.
38 Omi and Winant contend racial projects are “simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of
racial dynamics, and an effort to reorganize and redistribute resources along particular racial lines” (56).
has been cast as deviant, in need of regulation, and an economic and social threat to white, US Americans as well as the racial makeup of the nation. US racial hierarchies designating Mexicans as inferior compounded this construction. For example, whites in 1930s California viewed Mexican culture as “backward” and believed “Mexicans’ social inferiority arose from their biological inferiority” (Molina, Fit 10). Mexican women were depicted as especially threatening because of their perceived hyper-fertility. Public discourses designating people of Mexican origin as socially or culturally inferior to white, US Americans continued to shape US racial and gender hierarchies throughout the twentieth century. Medicalized racism in the form of sterilization targeted Mexican women in 1970s Los Angeles. Sociologist Elena R. Gutiérrez argues public discourse positioned Mexican-origin women as “an increasingly threatening mass of problematic child-bearers necessitating regulation” (391). She further stipulates the 1970s image of Mexican women as the “pregnant pilgrim” survives in contemporary US America, citing the 1994 passage of California’s Proposition 187 as evidence. This initiative, which was later overturned, barred undocumented (im)migrants from utilizing non-emergency health care, welfare, and public school education (396), indicating the undocumented and their children were unworthy of these public entitlements. Political scholar Robin Dale Jacobson argues the allegedly race-neutral proposition sought to criminalize Mexican (im)migration by “conflat[ing] Mexicans and the undocumented through an initial racialization of Mexicans as criminals” (48), buttressed by characterizations of Mexicans as “lazy, but also as shiftless or underhandedly acquisitive” (76), thus necessitating cutting services as “a solution to the problem of the

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39 Omi and Winant indicate the concept of biological inferiority was used to “explain racial inferiority as part of a natural order of humankind” (14-15), which positioned white, US Americans as superior to people of color. Biological explanations for US racial hierarchies lost traction during the 1920s and 1930s.
perceived dependent nature of these fecund Mexicans” (119). These characterizations point to the historical roots and continued prominence of stereotypes about Mexican women, their bodies, and their place in US racial and gender hierarchies. IRCA’s passage complemented these racial and gender scripts by opening the nation to more female (im)migrants from Mexico who quickly became central figures in anti-(im)migrant campaigns that blamed and vilified undocumented (im)migrants for threatening the nation’s population demographics and cultural identity.

Contemporary treatments of Mexican women as hyper-fertile and a sexual threat to US racial purity and social structures are supported and compounded by historical racial scripts targeting women of color and their bodies. Specifically, Black and Asian American women’s bodies and sexuality have historically been denigrated by cultural norms and legal decisions. For example, in 1867, the state of Kentucky “defined a rapist as one who shall ‘unlawfully and carnally know any white woman, against her will or consent’” (Sommerville 148). Race-specific rape laws offered no protection for Black women, whether as victims of intraracial or interracial rape. The nineteenth-century legal system treated black women as hypersexual and thus “‘unrapeable’ and undeserving of protection or sympathy” (West and Johnson). Similarly, federal laws persecuted women of Asian descent, crystalizing popular notions of Asian women as whores or prostitutes. The Page Law of 1875 “relied on the assumption that all Chinese women wishing to immigrate to the United States were prostitutes” (Molina, How Race 83), and, as a result, prohibited the entry of Chinese prostitutes and ultimately most Chinese women.

Decades later, Japanese (American) women faced similar scrutiny as their “amazing fecundity”

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40 Jacobson extends this argument, asserting “the undocumented are understood as Mexicans; then since Mexicans are more likely to violate immigration law, they are understood as displaying a tendency toward criminality. Mexicanness becomes criminalized though a conflation with the undocumented” (58-9).
41 These negative characterizations of Mexican women not only show how historically “racist ideologies stressing superiority of one nation over another often used gendered discourses to enhance their message” (Willis and Yeoh xvi-xvii), but also demonstrate how intertwined race and gender remain in the contemporary period.
was linked “with an imminent economic and geographical takeover of California by the Japanese” (Molina *Fit to Be* 107). These scripts provide linguistic, cultural, and legal examples of women of color as hypersexual and a threat to white racial purity. These patterns make contemporary characterizations of Mexican (American) women birthing children in order to establish firm ties to the US and utilize the nation’s social services seem plausible and familiar. Further, the interconnectedness of these scripts underscores the transference of racial scripts and the necessity of treating race as relational.

Positive constructions of white, US American women’s sexuality and gender also impact perceptions and treatments of Mexican women in the US. Social and legal understandings of white, US women’s sexuality emphasize morality and purity and position these women as good mothers and appropriately or normatively fertile. This sharply contrasts depictions of women of color as devious, bad mothers, and hyper-fertile. Scholar Rosa-Linda Fregoso points out how motherhood is racialized and represented in binary terms, with dominant society “linking its positive aspects with white identity…and its negative aspects with Chicana identity” (66). White femininity, understood as positive, becomes the norm, center, and the basis for comparison and evaluation. Revealing and challenging whiteness as the norm, anthropologist Leo R. Chavez instructs, “Shifting assumptions that valorize white women’s fertility levels…would alter the way Latina fertility is represented. Rather than Latinas being characterized as having ‘comparatively high’ birth rates, Anglo women may be characterized as having ‘comparatively low’ birth rates” (89). Chavez’s alternative framework places white women outside the norm, thus defying popular convictions that whiteness stands as the central and normative identity within the US. Conversely, dominant depictions of Mexican women as hyper-fertile threats and bad mothers “confirmed their inferiority to whites and firmly placed them outside the bounds of
social membership in the United States” (Molina, Fit 97). Examining racial scripts targeting women reveals how racism and sexism have historically intersected to validate white femininity and vilify the bodies and sexuality of women of color.

Shifting to the post-IRCA era, I argue that sex- and race-based narratives remain entangled in contemporary (im)migration rhetoric. Current discourse, however, shifts from the overt language of racial inferiority, which shaped previous generations of anti-(im)migrant rhetoric, to a more direct focus on bodies and gender performance. Using the documentary Border, I show how contemporary anti-(im)migrant reformers focus explicitly on gender, sex, and reproduction as logical and essential reasons for exclusion and border regulation. Meanwhile, using the documentary Mojados, I demonstrate how pro-(im)migrant texts employ surprisingly similar sex-based rationale, though for the purpose of embracing male (im)migrants while scapegoating female (im)migrants or male (im)migrants’ wives who remain in their home nation. I begin with an evaluation of Border in order to examine how cultural texts disseminate gender-based narratives and also serve as a site for post-IRCA racial formation projects focused on undocumented (im)migration.

**Border: Casting Female (Im)migrants as Victims and Perpetrators**

The documentary Border: The Divide between the American Dream and the American Nightmare (2008) recognizes the feminization of (im)migration and places a spotlight on the (im)migration experiences of undocumented women (im)migrants and their lives in the US. Border also investigates the effects of women and children (im)migrants on US border defense strategies and social services. Two women, Miriam and Irma, from Guadalajara, Mexico face deportation, but wish to remain in the US with their children who are US citizens. During their interview, they also address the physical threats facing female (im)migrants upon entering the
border region, including sexual assault. This interview sets the stage for the film’s competing treatments of female (im)migrants, which suggest female (im)migrants need US American men to protect them from coyotes and Mexican men during their (im)migration and that the same women constitute a threat to US social services while they (and their children) reside in the US. These seemingly opposite characterizations of female (im)migrants as victims or a threat arise from the same conviction: Mexican women lack the basic competence to care for and protect themselves and their children, and thus require the aid of male protectors and/or exploit US social services. This opinion may manifest as liberal, conservative, anti-(im)migrant, or pro-(im)migrant, signifying the pervasive gender discrimination in US border discourse.

*Border* premiered in 2008 at film festivals and in limited release, receiving considerable press and acclaim from conservative media commentators. The director, Chris Burgard, made the rounds on conservative talk shows, including programs hosted by Glenn Beck, Lou Dobbs, and Sean Hannity. *Border* was filmed “on location,” with Burgard and crew traveling along the US-Mexican border through California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas. Burgard worked in close collaboration with Minutemen Civil Defense Corps (MCDC) founder Chris Simcox, and MCDC members and volunteers appeared and spoke throughout the documentary. The film

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42 According to the documentary’s Web site (www.bordermovie.com), *Border* also won several film festival awards, including the Director’s Choice Award from the Pensacola International Film Festival, Best Documentary at the California Independent Film Festival, and the Bronze Remi Award at the Worldfest-Houston film festival.

43 The MCDC operated from 2005-2010 as a self-described volunteer group dedicated to stopping “illegal” (im)migrants from entering the US via the US-Mexico border. While MCDC has officially disbanded, other extrajudicial groups continue to patrol the border, equating their presence to a neighborhood watch.

44 Burgard also interviewed politicians, local and federal law enforcement officers, local ranchers, human rights activists, and undocumented (im)migrants, which the film continuously refers to as “illegal aliens.” Focused on “illegals” invading the US, the film blames the federal government for its inability to secure the southern border and the rise of undocumented (im)migrants entering the country. *Border* suggests the government’s inability to secure the border is a myth and should be characterized as unwillingness, since a secure border would threaten alliances with Mexico and corporate America. Because the government refuses to protect citizens from “illegals,” the “common man” must take action. Their method of taking action focuses on a militarized presence at the US-Mexico border, an organized campaign against undocumented (im)migrants, and praising the commitment, values and work of border defense groups.
casts MCDC as protecting the human rights and dignity of US Americans and Mexicans alike. Members make statements such as, “There’s a lot of abuse that goes on [during (im)migration] trips…you have to realize these are not people to the coyotes. They are commodities to be moved.” This explanation suggests (im)migrants are people to the MCDC and they must be defended through direct political action. The film validates MCDC’s claims that the organization protects US Americans from violence, drugs, and a criminal element crossing the border, while simultaneously preventing Mexicans from ending up as victims of a modern-day slave trade by refusing and reducing entry while protecting female (im)migrants from sexual exploitation at the hands of coyotes.

The MCDC claiming to protect and support women regardless of their national identity suggests the group recognizes undocumented (im)migration as a complex, transnational issue. This narrative underlining the group’s “objectiveness” aligns with the tenants of documentary. By marketing Border within the truth-telling, objective, or “honest representation” conventions of documentary (Aufderheide), the filmmakers’ have produced an explicitly anti-(im)migrant cultural production that viewers may consume as a reasonable, rational, authentic, and objective depiction of undocumented (im)migration at the US-Mexican border. Filmmakers and interviewees depicting the US as a nation of (im)migrants, racially inclusive, and accepting of diversity works to support this point.

Through protectionist narratives and genre conventions, the documentary masquerades as an anti-racist and a pro-woman cultural text. Yet, the filmmakers articulate an anti-female border rhetoric, which I will discuss in detail below, suggesting female (im)migrants and their children deplete US social services intended for citizens and that female (im)migrants enter the country in order to birth “anchor” babies who overtax US social services. Border relies upon sexism,
misogyny, and ostensibly pro-woman advocacy to justify exclusionary discourse. The filmmakers’ aggressively refute race-based calls for exclusion; instead they embrace color-blind racism and misogyny as the foundation for (im)migrants’ exclusion and closed-border policies. The film’s promotion of color-blindness (alongside misogyny) reflect a larger rhetorical shift across the political spectrum and within undocumented (im)migration debates.

*Border* names Mexican (im)migrants as a threat to US society, but frames border defense initiatives and exclusion efforts as a color-blind project to protect the nation. For Burgard, monitoring and controlling the US-Mexico border is a nationalist project. However, recognizing many US Americans characterize the MCDC organization and closed-border activists as racist, Burgard deals with this issue directly—perhaps an effort to avoid the film being cast in the same light. Addressing charges of racism, MCDC leader Tim Donnelly responds, “We are a very tolerant and very generous people, but for God’s sake there’s a limit.” Burgard asks in a dubious tone if Donnelly is racist. Donnelly responds, “I don’t see race; I don’t see color” and then shows a picture of his wife who is “of another race” and says “you tell me” if I’m racist. While the film treats Donnelly’s “you tell me” response as a rhetorical question, sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva names this type of language and redirection strategy as post-Civil rights racial speech indicative of color-blind racism (57). Bonilla-Silva argues many whites use “discursive buffers” to couch their racial views; for example, using phrases such as “I’m not racist” (or Donnelly’s “I don’t see race”) “before or after someone states something that is or could be interpreted as racist” (57). Donnelly employs color-blind logic by naming his interracial marriage as evidence against racism. He fails to understand his role in guarding the border and

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45 Bonilla-Silva defines color-blind racism as an ideology that “explains contemporary racial inequality as the outcome of nonracial dynamics,” indicating whites rationalize contemporary racial inequalities are the result of “market dynamics, naturally occurring phenomena, and blacks’ imputed cultural limitations” (2).
belief that (im)migrants abuse US citizens’ “generosity” as racial discrimination, as his “generosity” excludes Mexican (im)migrants who purportedly tax US systems.

The filmmakers do not allow Donnelly’s interview to stand on its own merits and seek additional proof the organization and its members are not racist. Burgard discusses the issue of racism with shift boss David Jones, who is Native American and one of the few people of color associated with the group. Jones refutes charges the MCDC is racist; he states, “If we find they start talking bigotry on the line, they’re gone. We will not tolerate that.” The organization may reject racist talk on the line, but racist ideologies still implicitly govern their presence at the border. For example, the group calls for the exclusion and deportation of undocumented (im)migrants, whether Mexicans or persons from nations such as Syria and Iran (referred to as “OTMs” or “other than Mexicans”). The MCDC marks all undocumented (im)migrants as a threat, regardless of nation of origin or perceived/actual reason for (im)migrating, and deems them undesirable entrants. Border features a slide containing facts and figures from Homeland Security indicating over 605,000 “OTMs” were apprehended between 2001 and 2005, over 91,000 arrived from “countries with State Sponsored Terrorism,” and over 45,000 “were released and have absconded into American society.” MCDC may censor and reject overtly racist discourse, but fear and hatred of the racial and national “Other” thrives. Burgard and the MCDC attempt to dismiss charges of racism by communicating color-blind logic. Additionally, as I will demonstrate, the film constructs female (im)migrants as hapless victims and a threat to themselves or as strategic and conniving women who abuse US social services and constitute a threat to the nation. Both strategies reveal the pervasive gender discrimination and misogyny in US border defense discourse.
Protectionist Narratives

The filmmakers and interviewees adopt protectionist narratives to depict vigilantes’ patrol efforts as humanitarian and centered on women’s safety. Protectionist narratives unfold in *Border* in two distinct ways. First, MCDC claims to protect brown (im)migrant women from brown men, exemplifying Gayatri Spivak’s critique of narratives framed as “White men saving brown women from brown men” (539). This protectionist narrative privileges white men’s understanding of themselves and their role at the US-Mexico border, while silencing women’s voices and neglecting their standpoints. MCDC also claims to protect white, US American women from the dangers of undocumented (im)migration. This framework marks (im)migrants as racial threat, and establishes white men’s racial and gender dominance. As I will demonstrate in this section, *Border* views men of color, particularly Mexican men, as violent and potential rapists and deadbeat, prototypical men of color. In contrast, the film casts US American men (mostly white in the documentary) as women’s protectors and shepherds to safety. In both cases, protectionist narratives define the border as male-controlled space.

*Border* frames anti-(im)migrant groups’ presence at the US-Mexico border as advocacy work, partially rooted in the desire to protect (im)migrant women from the dangerous border region. The US-Mexico border is plagued by an anti-female climate placing women’s lives in danger. Citing a 2009 study on Latina (im)migrant women, Susan C. Pearce, Elizabeth J. Clifford, and Reena Tandon note that findings indicate “89 percent of these women state that passage to the United States is more violent for women than for men. Once they [female (im)migrants] cross the border, they will likely also be met by men rather than women” (81), including Border Patrol agents and vigilante groups comprised mainly of men. This study exposes Border Patrol agents and groups such as MCDC as possible sources of violence against
women. Such evidence not only counters vigilante groups’ claims and commitment to protection, but reveals the film’s inherently racialized understanding of violence in which violence perpetrated by white men is invisible. *Border* heralds US American border defense volunteers as women’s and the US nation-state’s saviors incapable of violence, while treating men of color as potential perpetrators or offenders. It also privileges MCDC members’ perspective on border violence, without addressing female (im)migrants’ perspective on violent passages and encounters with vigilante groups.

For Burgard, controlling the US-Mexico border is a nationalist and imperialist project, but he justifies his presence (and that of the MCDC) through familiar gendered tropes of female victimization. The Minutemen deem themselves advocates for (im)migrant women, suggesting they have a responsibility to those dying of exposure and violent crimes on the northern side of the border. In a protectionist section of *Border*, an audio excerpt of news coverage indicates authorities detained women who were smuggled into the country “by sex traffickers who prostitute the women to large groups of (im)migrant workers.” As self-proclaimed defenders of human rights, Minutemen, generally white males, position themselves as protecting brown women from brown men, namely coyotes (perceived as brown men) who intend to rape, prostitute, or murder women. The film normalizes power disparities between men and women and among male subjects, particularly by validating the “policing of some men by other men” (Kimmel xv). In this case, we see the policing of brown men by white men. Although *Border* denies race as a factor in US border defense, the film’s depiction of white people (particularly white, US American men) as noble protectors underscores the filmmakers’ understanding of whiteness and masculinity as greater than brownness and femininity.

*Border* and the MCDC present the group’s work at the US-Mexico border as selfless and
humanitarian, but their presence is actually an extension of western imperialism. Border defense “advocacy” is part of the United States’ historical practice of dominating or “protecting” people from developing nations who “need” help (whether or not desired).\textsuperscript{46} Addressing one of the possible dangers facing female (im)migrants, Minutemen volunteers describe their encounters with “rape trees” or trophy trees. Bob “Chromedome” Wright, the Director of MCDC New Mexico, calls the rape tree “a particularly barbaric little game some of the coyotes play…they’ll take the better lookin’ girls and they wander them off from the group and they rape ‘em. And the big thing is you make the girls hang their panties on the tree.” Volunteers also report seeing blood-stained ground around the tree.\textsuperscript{47} The Minutemen refer to the trees and the acts behind them as barbaric (which they are), and believe volunteers’ presence at the border allows the organization to protect female (im)migrants from such brutality and fulfill MCDC’s self-proclaimed commitment to defending human rights. The film illustrates an imperialist mentality by validating and praising US American men’s willingness to extend a helping or civilized hand to (im)migrant women being raped and brutalized by Mexican “barbarians.” Yet, their intervention reproduces dominant racial logic that women require protection from “barbaric” and aggressively hypersexual Mexican men.

Sexism in border defense manifests through the circulation of protectionist narratives. Many men throughout the (im)migration process (whether brothers, fathers, or husbands or Border Patrol agents and vigilantes) espouse their commitment to protecting women from harm caused by bad men. This “protection” mentality not only contributes to “racial, ethnic, and class divisions among men” as they seek to “[protect] ‘their’ women from rape,” but “in the process,

\textsuperscript{46} This belief stems from imperialist thinking described as “the white man’s burden.”
\textsuperscript{47} A subsequent interview featuring Ray Ybarra, a representative from the ACLU, questions the validity of the rape tree, indicating their research and conversations with (im)migrants have not confirmed these findings.
access to women’s bodies and sexualities becomes constructed as a matter for males, rather than females, to determine” (Luibhéid 129). Also noteworthy, protectionist narratives do not apply to non-women crossers. Yet, framed as a noble deed, the “defense” of women means an ego boost for men, in addition to functioning as a seemingly legitimate and compassionate action in support of victim of violence. This framework affirms patriarchal expressions of masculinity, which also manifest as a drive to protect white women.

The film also establishes white, US American males as responsible for protecting white, US American females in the unsafe US-Mexico border region. The film frames white, local women as vulnerable and facing danger from (im)migrants moving through and destroying their property and making them feel helpless in their homes. Melissa Owens, a white, US American women who is identified as a ranch owner and conservationist, discusses the destruction of her ranch and the presence of a “dangerous element” moving though her property. Owens states, “It’s, uh, tense. I’m always aware, looking over my shoulder, listening for things…You’re never at ease…they cross my road… are they up on the ridge watching me with binoculars…watching what I’m doing?” In response to whether she feels safe at home, Owens comments, “I could say that I have a good stop fence around my buildings…I have two dogs…motion detector lights on all my buildings, and I’m still not safe.” Burgard notes these crimes and a sense of defenselessness have compromised male ranchers’ ability to protect their property and their wives: “fellas on ranches down here have to leave their wives at home and come home and find dead bodies four hundred yards by their house.” This commentary addresses how the threat of (im)migrants and violence associated with undocumented (im)migration can emasculate US

48 By claiming the latter, anti-(im)migrant groups never consider addressing or challenging US decisions and actions that contribute to violence at the border, such as government-sponsored operations forcing (im)migrants to enter the US through barren desert environments rather than through more populated and secure urban areas.
American men seeking to protect their property and families. It also signifies the tenuous ground between protecting (woman) (im)migrants and understanding all (im)migrants as a threat.

The MCDC comes to the rescue of US American men in the border region by providing a platform to assert their masculinity and control as citizens. Communications scholar Michelle A. Holling argues groups like the MCDC need “only to appeal to a public’s insecurities and a resurgent xenophobic patriotism and to tap into masculine concerns of being dominated in order to rally a collective against the racial colonizer” (“Patrolling” 109). Sure enough, Robert, a MCDC volunteer charges, “It’s time to stand up and do something. You going to walk around your life in fear or are you going to stand up like a man?” Robert’s commentary equates defense-inspired action, bravery, and masculinity. Classifying all three characteristics as antithetical to fear places strict parameters on appropriate expressions of male citizenry and masculinity, calling upon US male citizens to “stand up” like men, which includes protecting allegedly “defenseless” women from the hazards of the border region and undocumented (im)migration.

*No Longer Victims, Blaming Female (Im)migrants*

Sex-based border defense rhetoric ranges from protectionist narratives to characterizing women (im)migrants as threats to the US. The latter materializes through descriptions and treatments of (im)migrant women as hyper-fertile and pregnant pilgrims whose children drain US medical and educational services. Sexist border rhetoric constructs women as threatening on the basis of their potentially procreative bodies. Pearce, Clifford, and Tandon indicate “one theme that permeates the arena of irregular means of entry for women is the woman’s physicality—quite often, she is viewed as a body that is the object of surveillance, the subject of
uncontrolled fertility, the source of sexual pleasure, and the target of control” (99). Pervasive racial scripts have framed Mexican women as hyper-fertile, pregnant pilgrims, hyper-sexual, and as bad mothers, thus ensuring women’s bodies are under constant scrutiny and can be named as a legitimate threat and cause for concern and response. Border uses the feminization of (im)migration to show female (im)migrants place US citizens and services at risk.

Border perpetuates and embraces race-based stereotypes through medicalized racism couched in the vilification of female (im)migrants. During an interview featured in the documentary, Victor Davis Hanson, a professor and author of Mexifornia, discusses the effects of unregulated sexuality. Recounting his experience at a local hospital, Hanson states, “I went to the emergency room…local hospital where I was born…43 people there. No one spoke English; no one had health insurance; they had interpreters; they had free medical care. Most people weren’t sick. They just had a headache, depression.” Hanson’s assessment relies upon the assumption that all Spanish-speakers without health insurance are undocumented. Based upon this flawed logic, he concludes that undocumented people abuse the US medical system, noting we are “doing so much for people here illegally from Mexico,” which bankrupts the hospitals, forces them to close, and prevents deserving people (coded as US Americans who possess health insurance) from accessing these services.

While Hanson’s initial comments target all undocumented persons, or those he perceives as undocumented, he ultimately takes aim at female (im)migrants. He asserts, “People from Mexico don’t have pre-natal care…so they walk across the border for it and get it for free.”

49 Pearce, Clifford, and Tandon also assert that “nativist outrage over immigrant women has racial overtones. The fear is the loss of a perceived national identity rooted in racial whiteness as more nonwhites migrate and populate the country, upsetting the historical racial balance” (7).

50 Through a voiceover, Burgard indicates that California leads the nation in hospital closures due to undocumented (im)migrants’ abuse of the system.
Hanson uses gender-neutral language such as “people,” but his focus on “pre-natal care” clearly targets women. In their work on (im)migration and women, Pearce, Clifford, and Tandon contend, “When nativist-oriented discussions mention women, it is often in the context of fertility: either the women are too fertile, or they are using childbirth to get a foot in the (U.S.) door” (6). The anti-(im)migrant discourse advanced in Border subscribes to and reproduces both stereotypes. Sexuality-based exclusion rationale emphasizes (im)migrants’ perceived hyper-fertile bodies or desire to produce an “anchor baby” as threatening to the nation’s economic and social structures. Thus, female (im)migrants and their reproductive bodies must be excluded from the US nation-state.

Racist rhetoric may be downplayed by Border filmmakers and MCDC leadership, but sexuality that is racially differentiated is central to discussions of defending the US from a changing population and values system. Within the first two minutes of Border, Burgard establishes his own normative sexuality. He indicates he is “happiest being a dad,” as the screen shows pictures of Burgard with his wife and children. From the beginning, Burgard as a father, protector, and example of normative sexuality frame the film. Yet, he contends this way of life, and his family’s future is being threatened by unchecked “illegal” (im)migration, which is causing a drain on US social services, particularly in the public schools his children attend.

Burgard expresses frustration that his “kids don’t speak Spanish well enough to get the most out

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51 Pre-natal care is deemed exclusively the responsibility of women and marked as a woman’s (political, medical, social) issue, even though reproduction impacts men and women.
52 Leo R. Chavez explains how women as reproductive threats are understood as threatening to society. He writes, “The discourse surrounding Latina reproduction is...about reinforcing a characterization of Anglos as the legitimate Americans who are being supplanted demographically by less legitimate Latinos” (88). Jonathan Xavier Inda frames the issue through biopolitical terms, arguing that “U.S. efforts to deny undocumented women access to prenatal care are really attempts to govern the proper form of species reproduction. The fight against the enemy takes place on the terrain of the immigrant woman’s body, the aim being to eliminate the enemy through controlling its capacity to reproduce” (153). Both scholars’ arguments point to a modern day eugenics project.
of our public schools,” suggesting Spanish is more prevalent than English in Southern California
and that schools accommodate Spanish-speaking children at the expense of English-speaking
children (which presumes children fall into one category or the other). While he does not
specifically mention sexuality, according to Burgard, these young, brown, Spanish-speakers are
the children of undocumented (im)migrants, who the film has already labeled as hyper-fertile
breeders. Burgard’s anxiety reflects popular fears of invasion and a belief that (im)migrants are
instigating the “Reconquista” of the southwest US. These fears reflect the belief the US is a
white nation and Mexicans or brown-skinned outsiders are a threat to white people’s power,
privilege, and authority.

Border suggests undocumented families—constituted by the presence of women and
children—present a danger to the US. Anti-female (im)migrant discourse is characterized by a
focus on “high fertility and population growth; reproduction as a ‘reconquest’ of the United
States; and the immigrant overuse of U.S. social services” (Chavez 71). Through its use of
interviews, the documentary validates prevailing narratives of foreign women with US
American-born children wanting to stay in the US. Border opens with an interview featuring two
women, Miriam and Irma from Guadalajara, who have been living and working in the US
without documentation. However, Irma indicates she is “being deported,” which is particularly
devastating to the family unit, as her “children are American” citizens and she wants to stay with
them. The film does not refer to the children as anchor babies; however Irma indicates she wants
to stay with her children, but stresses, “If I leave, they have to leave with me. I can’t leave them
behind.” The family unit is threatened but also portrayed as threatening. In a similar vein, a US
Border Patrol agent informs Burgard they see an increase in family units and young children
crossing through the desert. The agent indicates the Department of Homeland Security believes
children are being used because families with young children gain the attention of agents, thus serving as a distraction or “decoy” allowing the coyotes to push through other “product” (or (im)migrants). While showing an image of a family comprised of a male and female adult and two children around the ages of eight and ten, text on the screen informs viewers, “The Coyotes used this family as a decoy. While Border Patrol filled out paperwork, nine more groups hit the fence in this mile stretch.” Whether female (im)migrants enter the US and birth an “anchor baby” or children distract agents to the degree that other (im)migrants (also seen as possible terrorists, as demonstrated in Chapter 3) can slip by undetected, Border suggests they threaten the US.

The film develops the relationship between unregulated sexuality and an unregulated border through a series of interviews with California Congressman Dana Rohrabacher (R). Addressing this connection, anthropologist Jessica Chapin argues “the immigrant, documented or not, is often viewed as opening the door for the entry of offspring…for a flood of (always brown-skinned) others that will deprive ‘true nationals’ of language, sovereignty, and cultural heritage” (414). Articulating these fears within the documentary, Rohrabacher argues “illegals” have a dramatic impact on our economy and on the standard of living of our people….our health care system in many states is breaking down because many of the people who are here illegally are going in and using the emergency room as if it’s their HMO. Jails are crowded with people who are not supposed to be here in the first place. And then of course the school systems are just overcrowded with students who are coming from another country…and they’re not supposed to be here, and teachers spend all their time on kids who don’t know basics of English while ignoring the needs of the ordinary kids who need their attention to learn. (Border)

Rohrabacher’s indictment of “illegals” coincides with several broad popular and cultural
racialized narratives, including the notion that Mexican women reproduce at high rates, their children will overpopulate the local school systems, and, speaking to Burgard’s fear, the latter’s presence will diminish the quality of education for “ordinary” or “normal” white, US American children. Thus, as Chapin argues, beliefs that brown-skinned (im)migrants are entering the US in large numbers magnify fears about a loss of culture and US American way of life. While women and children are not always explicitly identified or blamed, female bodies and their reproductive capacities are, in this instance, positioned as a threat to white, US Americans’ sovereignty. Leo R. Chavez notes female (im)migrants are depicted as “a more insidious invasion, one that included the capacity of the invaders to reproduce themselves: the women being carried into U.S. territory carried with them the seeds of future generations” (76). This assessment is reflected in the sexist rhetoric conveyed about undocumented (im)migrants, especially women and children, in anti-(im)migrant rhetoric. The documentary casts Mexican women’s sexuality as a threat on the basis of historically generated stereotypes depicting Mexican women as hyper-fertile and exploiting US social services.

An anti-brown, anti-female rhetoric pervades *Border* through constructions of Mexican women as hyper-fertile, birthing anchor babies, and producing children who drain US social services such as medical care and education. In a seemingly oppositional depiction, *Border* also depicts (im)migrant women as victims of gender-based violence at the border. However, in designating (im)migrant women as victims, groups such as the MCDC mark them as helpless and out-of-place in the white, male-dominated environment. Though couched in gendered-terminology, this racialized rhetoric works to define racial and social order in the US and justify the exclusion of brown-skinned (im)migrants. Yet, *Border* resists discussions of race and charges of racism in its anti-(im)migrant discourse by reframing (im)migration through a gender lens,
specifically focusing on anti-(im)migrant groups’ (such as MCDC) proclaimed desire to protect women from harm. The documentary uses the increase in female (im)migrants’ post-IRCA to highlight concerns about the anti-female climate at the US-Mexico border. Noting female (im)migrants’ susceptibility to physical and sexual violence, *Border* cites this as evidence for why foreign women should only (im)migrate to the US through legal channels. Members of the MCDC express concerns about female (im)migrants’ safety; however, if undocumented women are unwilling to prioritize their own safety (according to US definitions of bodily safety and security), the documentary indicates they must be forcefully excluded in order to ensure the health and security of the US and its citizens, particularly women and children.

**Mojados: Privileging Androcentric (Im)migration and Traditional Gender Roles**

Directed by Tommy Davis, the documentary *Mojados: Through the Night* (2004) depicts undocumented Mexican (im)migrants as men who enter the US in order to fulfill their roles as family providers. In contrast to *Border*, women, particularly female (im)migrants, remain virtually absent from the narrative, while the documentary frames its male subjects as the definitive (im)migrant. This androcentric choice preserves outdated assumptions of (im)migration as a mostly male undertaking, failing to acknowledge the changing demographics and increase in female (im)migrants post-IRCA. Instead, *Mojados* suggests women inhabit traditional gender roles: they stay in Mexico, care for their children, and await their husbands’ return. Further, *Mojados* establishes women (and children) as the impetus for men’s (im)migration to the US. Painting women as the motivation for undocumented (im)migration to the US indicates Mexican women, even in their absence, make the US vulnerable. By marking non-(im)migrating women, rather than (im)migrant men as an underlying threat to US security and stability, *Mojados* intervenes in and reshapes US debates regarding the economic and social
impact of undocumented (im)migrants. Mojados presents male (im)migrants as strong and capable contributors who embody dominant masculinity, while depicting non-(im)migrating women as responsible for the nation’s perceived vulnerability. The film participates in an anti-feminist backlash by celebrating male (im)migrants’ embodiment of traditional gender roles and support for the patriarchal family, thus participating in the representations of race and (im)migration through the lens of gender.

Mojados follows four Mexican male (im)migrants—Oso, Guapo, Tigre, and Viejo—seeking to cross the US-Mexican border via the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo River. The men journey from Michoacán, Mexico to the border. They plan to work in the US and send money home, but must first endure a dangerous crossing outside the authorized checkpoints. The documentary spans the 10-day (im)migration, with most footage covering their experience after crossing into Texas. Mojados documents the perils of undocumented crossing, including dangerous weather conditions, lack of water, barbed-wire fences, encounters with wildlife, and being spotted and detained by US Border Patrol. The film works as a quest narrative. However, beneath this sympathetic account, I see issues of gender and sexuality affecting how Mojados presents male (im)migrants for US American viewers’ consumption—constructing the men as heroic providers who embody traditional masculinity displaces racial analysis.

My emphasis on gender and sexuality differs from the focus of popular reviews of Mojados. Reviewers for publications such as The Austin Chronicle, New York magazine, and The New York Times tend to focus on Davis’ narration, his perseverance and commitment to the project, and the film’s effectiveness in conveying the hardships of undocumented (im)migration to a US audience. For example, commenting on Davis’ tone, Dana Stevens for NYT describes Davis’ narration as “overly folksy,” with the New York review indicating, “Davis’s initially
florid narration wisely becomes more terse as the film moves along.” Also remarking on the
documentarian, Rachel Proctor for The Austin Chronicle awards Tommy Davis the “Golden
Cojones” award for “walk[ing] 120 miles to film four of the thousands of Mexicans who illegally
enter the US on foot each year.” In each of these assessments, the reviewers discuss how the
audience might respond to Davis or his commitment to the project, rather than interrogating how
he depicted the (im)migrants and their experience entering the US without documentation.
Proctor does indicate that Mojados “sends a powerful message” about the risk (im)migrants take,
with Stevens elaborating on the dangers of “scaling cattle fences and trying to orient themselves
in the featureless desert” and the trials of hiding from the US Border Patrol and escaping death
“by the sheerest of luck.” The popular reviews of Mojados offer little analysis of the structural
forces shaping the men’s (im)migration or national, racial, or gender biases embedded in Davis’
narration.

My analysis of Mojados shows how Director Tommy Davis understands the relationship
between (im)migration and gender. I argue Davis understands (im)migration as a male
undertaking and uses gender, particularly masculinity, to normalize (im)migrants and make
undocumented (im)migration more palatable and less threatening to US viewers.53 In evaluating
how gendered discourse mutes the role of race, I first show how Davis objects to racism and
nationalism so prevalent in (im)migration discourse. Davis recognizes the national debate on
(im)migration features a vocal anti-(im)migrant faction who argue brown-skinned (im)migrants
compromise the racial makeup of the US and white citizens’ dominance. In order to distance the
film from this camp, Davis focuses on how Mexican men embody conventional masculine and

53 This assimilationist or “we’re just like you” model resembles Jodi Melamed’s argument that twentieth-century US
race novels “sought to demonstrate to white middle-class readers that members of the African American middle
class were the same as they were, heteronormative, patriotic, and irrepresibly upwardly mobile” (68).
(im)migrant tropes (e.g. hard-working, strong, stoic providers, and contributors) and should be welcomed into the US. Further, he redeploy these tropes as rationale for nation-making and acceptance. I also discuss the documentary’s understanding and treatment of masculinity, and argue its use of provider narratives portrays (im)migrants as men seeking to fulfill their duties who, therefore, should not be construed as a threat to the US or its citizens. Finally, I consider the film’s treatment of women, particularly their absence from the border region. The film actively erases evidence of female (im)migrants, suggests the borderlands is an unsafe space for women, and ultimately blames women for men’s (im)migration in order to make its point about masculinity. Mojados depicts women as an indirect threat to the US; they are portrayed as the motivation and thus culprits behind any damage, destruction, or threat caused to the US by undocumented (im)migration or (im)migrants.

Gender, Not Race and Nation

Mojados opens with Davis’ sympathetic philosophy on undocumented (im)migrants, which he uses to distance his (im)migration-themed documentary from racist and nationalist US (im)migration discourse. A biblical quotation appears in white text on a black screen as the film’s first image; it reads: “‘When a foreigner resides with you in your land, you must not oppress him’ (Isaiah 19:33).” Davis uses the quote to acknowledge many US Americans’ designation of Mexicans as unwelcome foreigners. The film immediately establishes the importance of national boundaries and positions Mexicans as foreigners, although deserving of fair treatment while living and working in the US. Davis exposes the prevailing racist and nationalist rhetoric—rooted in the longstanding acceptance of “Mexicans” and “foreigner” as synonymous (Molina, Fit 129)—and critiques this mindset. Even though he confirms Mexican (im)migrants as foreigners and the “Other” through the biblical quote, Davis attempts to distance
himself and the documentary from racist and xenophobic sentiment conveyed by anti-
(im)migrant groups by reframing the conversation about undocumented (im)migration and
(im)migrants through a focus on gender and highlighting men’s roles as providers and protectors.

Depicting the men and their reasons for (im)migrating through a gendered lens allows
Davis to distance Mojados from nationalist and racist rhetoric. Davis highlights the difference
between his treatment of (im)migrants and dominant anti-(im)migrant logic. He includes
eamples of the latter through interviews with local ranchers and Border Patrol agents who
articulate negative consequences of undocumented (im)migration. The ranchers recognize the
dangers (im)migrants face, and local rancher George Morin concedes he would “be afraid to take
off across here [Texas desert] with no water or nothing not knowing where the heck I was
going.” However, the ranchers also express irritation over “illegals” moving through and
destroying their property. Emphasizing this concern, they point to trash littering the brush and
calculate money lost to repairing damaged water wells, broken fences, and animal fatalities.54
Commenting on a damaged fence on his property, Morin explains, “They [undocumented
(im)migrants] just cut it, stomp on it, kick it, tear it.” Additionally, the trash littering his land is
more than an eyesore; Morin refers to it as a “big problem,” noting, “I pick up plastic all the
time…they leave their tortilla sacks around…the cows smell it…they eat it and it clogs up their
digestive system. They get gangrene and die.” This commentary underscores popular
conceptions that “the United States is associated with cleanliness, reason, progress, order,
investment capital, bodily integrity, and masculinity” (Chapin 409). Mexicans’ presence,
therefore, seems to compromise this order, and anti-(im)migrant voices depict (im)migrants as

54 Livestock ingest plastic bags and blankets or wander through broken fences only to be struck by passing vehicles.
foreigners who do not understand or have respect for US American ideas of personal property. The anti-(im)migrant perspective portrays (im)migrants as national and cultural outsiders who are unwelcome in the US. *Mojados* attempts to reverse this logic by creating sympathetic narratives about (im)migration, as described below, rather than blame-worthy (im)migrants.

**Men as Providers**

The film establishes the men as family providers seeking to fulfill their responsibilities as heads of household. Many (im)migrants believe the US presents the best opportunity to realize their dreams, though Davis indicates the men express concern about (im)migrating. In a voiceover, he notes Oso, Guapo, Tigre, and Viejo do not want to leave their homes, loved ones, or undertake a dangerous journey. However, the men feel compelled to act in order to buy a home, land, and to ensure economic stability for their families. This rationale for (im)migration embodies the “family provider” narrative in which men convey “they feel responsible as heads of household to maintain the family, and provide them opportunities for advancement” (Saucedo 155). Casting them as providers makes them more sympathetic and respectable to a US American audience. The men do not come to the US with the intention of staying or depleting social services, but to earn money to support their families, build community at home, and fulfill their roles as men willing to assume responsibility for their livelihood and futures. In characterizing the group as providers for their families who remain in Mexico, the film normalizes the men through patriarchal notions of “providing” as monetary and legitimizes their presence in the US. This framework also ensures that men remain “the unexamined center” of

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55 While US ranchers, vigilantes, and others opposed to (im)migrants’ presence in the US characterize the trash as an “eye-sore,” discarded items can signify a safe location to other (im)migrants entering the area.
56 The men rarely speak directly to the camera or participate in formal interviews, so viewers’ perceptions of them and their (im)migration are primarily shaped by Davis’ narration.
(im)migration discourse, which reinscribes the dominance of men and masculinity (Kimmel xiv).

*Mojados*’ representation of (im)migrant men relies upon dominant cultural norms of defining masculinity through the role of worker, provider, and patriarch. At twenty years old, Guapo is crossing for the first time, but his rationale for leaving Mexico relies upon the family provider narrative as well as the “American dream” discourse of home ownership. He plans to stay and work for two to three years and then return to his family in Mexico. In a voiceover, Davis says of Guapo’s (im)migration: “It’s all for his daughter. He doesn’t care about the risk or the border patrol; he’ll beat them all.” Viejo, Guapo’s brother-in-law, is 26. He has a wife and two sons and, according to Davis, “dreams of moving out of his parents’ house and building a home for his family.” Davis describes Oso as older, wiser, and the most experienced and successful (im)migrant in the local community who others seek out for assistance in crossing because of his “legendary” endurance. At 22, Tigre is also an experienced border-crosser; he’s been making the trip north for a decade, but has recently married and wants to “build a new home for his bride and his little girl.” *Mojados* crafts the men’s personal stories in a heteronormative way, emphasizing the role of provider and patriarch (all four men are married to women and have children). Davis chooses shots of the men embracing their children and wives and surrounded by family members who wish them well on their journey north. In doing so, Davis changes the terms of the discourse on undocumented (im)migration by arguing male (im)migrants are hard-working providers who sacrifice for their families, display “hegemonic [masculinity] in their own local economies” (McGinley and Cooper 5), and should be respected and understood as “good” people and contributors, rather than disastrous to US society.

*Mojados* demonstrates male (im)migrants’ masculinity by showing their willingness and ability to endure the dangers, fatigue, and tedium of an undocumented crossing. The desert
landscape and on-foot crossing into the US presents physical challenges, with (im)migrants walking without food and water for days, encountering dangerous weather conditions, and facing the threat of wild animals or the risk of people reporting them. In “endurance” narratives, men position themselves as “brave, noble, and fearless, all characteristics perceived as necessary for survival abroad” (Saucedo 150). (Im)migrants’ willingness and ability to undergo the physical and emotional stresses of (im)migration and survive in “the context of a dangerous environment highlights their masculinity” (Saucedo 153). In the documentary, Guapo straddles a barbed wire fence in the Texas desert; he jokes if he is unable to cross without causing bodily harm, he may have to return home and tell his wife, “I’ve got some cash, but no balls.” The men laugh at the joke, but their masculinity is at stake and under threat in the US (both physically in terms of their genitals and emotionally in terms of their ability to provide for their families). Their ability to conquer the environment verifies their masculinity. This joke also points to the fact that their wives and children remain in Mexico awaiting news, therefore reminding viewers of women’s constant presence and their role and investment in the (im)migration, even when absent from the screen. Presenting male (im)migrants as providers who intend to return to Mexico encourages a positive reading of male (im)migrants. Situating their wives and children as subjects in the background facilitates a negative perception of Mexican women and children, as I argue in the next section.

Women as Indirect Threats

The documentary portrays women and children as men’s motivation for (im)migrating to the US, thus they bear responsibility for the men’s presence in the US. The current (im)migration debate in the US requires a scapegoat, and, as shown previously, local ranchers interviewed in the film identify (im)migrants as a threat to their property and livelihood. Yet, as demonstrated in
the previous section, Davis rejects this logic and attempts to cultivate an image of male (im)migrants as non-threatening, respectable, and hard-working providers. In order to reconcile disparate classifications of (im)migrants as a destructive threat versus respectable individuals seeking to improve their lives, Davis must construct a new scapegoat. Mexican women, although not (im)migrating to the US, become the target in *Mojados*.

Davis casts the men’s wives as scapegoats by designating them as the cause of (im)migration. The women (who remain nameless and are rendered voiceless) appear on screen: Tigre’s wife hands her husband a bag as he departs for the US, and Viejo’s wife and children surround him as he prepares to leave. They never share their thoughts on their husbands’ (im)migration; instead Davis features interviews with the men explaining they (im)migrate in order to provide for their families. Tigre notes, “As long as one works…what kind of work…that’s not important…one works for his family…to send the money to Mexico.” Sending money to Mexico serves as a reminder women and children stand to benefit financially from men’s (im)migration to and work in the US. Mexican women “As racial-ethnic ‘others’…bear the brunt of nationalist, patriarchal, and heteronormative views that proliferate in the context of border economic development and migration from Mexico to the United States” (Segura and Zavella 20). Within *Mojados*, Mexican women appear insidious in light of the perceived drawbacks or threats of undocumented (im)migration articulated by ranchers, border patrol agents, or anti-(im)migrant camps.

Davis’ editing choices ensure images of the women and children are interweaved with shots of the men crossing into the US, emphasizing they inspire the undocumented (im)migration. Footage of the men taking a break, laying in the grass, and looking up at the sky are broken up by images of their families. Through voiceover commentary, Davis tells viewers
the (im)migrants worry about their children “forgetting who [they] are” or not understanding why they left. However, the men try to remain focused on the future and their desire to earn and send money home and improve their families’ lives by buying land, building a home, and pursuing an education. This commentary and the images of family members remind viewers the women, although physically absent, are ever-present, and that male (im)migrants will continue to enter the US in order to fulfill their dreams and provide for their families. Women constitute an indirect threat and bear responsibility for the alleged danger and destruction caused by undocumented (im)migration.

Although the women appearing in Mojados remain in Mexico, the documentary also deters females from (im)migrating by warning that the borderlands are an unsafe space and that undocumented female (im)migrants are susceptible to gender-based violence. An interview with US American rancher George Morin reveals specific brutality endured by female (im)migrants. Morin tells Davis he came across “two little girls about 15 years old…all beat to shit…thought they had a car wreck or something. Come to find out the coyote had raped them and beat the shit out of them and left them behind.” Morin’s cautionary tale exposes the misogyny and gender-based violence women encounter at various stages of (im)migration. However, this account also advances sexist narratives concerning white men rescuing and protecting brown women. Taken within the larger pro-worker and pro-male (im)migrant message of the film, Morin’s story suggests the borderlands and the US are not a space for women and child (im)migrants. This mentality feeds into the perception women should not (im)migrate—whether for safety reasons or to reduce the number of undocumented (im)migrants in the US—but stay at home where they remain safe from borderland violence but also blameworthy culprits motivating men’s (im)migration to the US.
Mojados focuses primarily on male (im)migrants’ experiences in the US, legitimates men as (im)migrants and earners, and constructs women as dependents. Reproducing traditional gender roles, Mojados normalizes the borderlands as a male space and (im)migration as a male endeavor. Further, by documenting the challenges men undergo to provide for their families, Davis attempts to make male (im)migrants and their stories more human and relatable to US American audiences than exclusionary race- or nation-based (im)migration discourse typically allows. While Davis attempts to sidestep racist and xenophobic rhetoric commonly directed at undocumented (im)migrants, his pro-(im)migrant and pro-masculine framework ultimately places the blame for their perceived “Otherness” on the women who remain at home.

Conclusion

The body, particularly female (im)migrant’s bodies, has become a flashpoint in border defense discourse. Commenting on the relationship between the border and bodies, rhetorician Kent A. Ono asserts, “If the border signifies a site of contestation over inclusion, access, rights, employment, and a future for one’s self and often one’s family, the body may serve as a border that prevents these aspirations from being attained” (30). Women’s bodies have become a site of contestation in (im)migrant-themed discourse, manifesting in several ways. First, closed-border advocates like those featured in Border characterize female (im)migrants as either a threat or in need of protection. According to protectionist narratives, women are susceptible to violence and their bodies hinder their successful and safe entry into the US. In contrast, women’s bodies, when read as reproductive vessels, are interpreted as a threat. These seemingly incompatible characterizations arise from the same view: Mexican women cannot take care of themselves, and thus require the assistance of male protectors and/or US social services. Both characterizations elicit the attention and resources of those monitoring the US border, which ultimately further
vilifies female (im)migrants as a drain on US social systems. Like Border, Mojados also presents men as women’s protectors, but director Tommy Davis casts male (im)migrants in this role. Mojados affirms that male (im)migrants display appropriately masculine behaviors, falling within US gender and behavioral norms designating men as brave, stoic, and economic providers. Yet, this affirmation depends upon framing the men’s wives and children as indirect threats, as their economic needs necessitate male (im)migrants seek work in the US. The treatment of women and women’s bodies as procreative and hyper-fertile and as both meek and threatening infiltrates anti- and pro-(im)migrant discourse, directing attention away from the exclusionary racial logic governing US border narratives.

Conversations about undocumented (im)migration in contemporary US America have long existed within a racist/non-racist binary. This simplistic division allows for mudslinging between the two camps and the support of dichotomous treatments of (im)migrants as good or bad, desirable or undesirable, or economic boon or bust. Each of these frameworks requires a condemnation of some cohort by both anti- and pro-(im)migrant opinions (e.g. undocumented (im)migrants or racist vigilantes). With anti-(im)migrant groups—such as the MCDC appearing in Border—seeking distance from charges of racism, misogynist language and the exclusion of “hyper-fertile” female (im)migrants becomes a means of advancing their fight for closed-border policies and deportation of undocumented (im)migrants who allegedly overtax social systems. Meanwhile, pro-(im)migrant camps seek to normalize and legitimate “good” (im)migrants who contribute to the US. However, by framing contributions through traditionally masculine endeavors, as seen in Mojados, they often inadvertently vilify women and children who remain in their home nations. The refusal to address the role of race in US thought and action on undocumented (im)migration has negatively drawn sex, gender, and sexuality into the debate and
linked the seemingly oppositional pro- and anti-(im)migrant camps.
CHAPTER 2: NARRATIVES OF RACE AND CLASS SURROUNDING CA PROPOSITION 187

In the midst of a state-wide recession and economic downturn resulting in job losses and a massive deficit, California governor Pete Wilson\textsuperscript{57} requested the US federal government reimburse the state for expenses incurred from managing and responding to undocumented (im)migration (Jacobson). Wilson’s request, compounded by the public’s rising frustration over the state’s economy, inspired a small group of Californians to draft “Save our State,” or Proposition 187, a 1994 ballot initiative banning “illegal aliens” from using state-funded social services such as healthcare and education. Passed but never implemented, Californians fervently debated the intentions and consequences of Proposition 187, including whether the legislation required undocumented (im)migrants’ exclusion/expulsion for economic- or race-based reasons.\textsuperscript{58}

From proposal to repeal, Proposition 187 became a tool for casting undocumented (im)migrants as a threat or boon to the state’s economic infrastructure.\textsuperscript{59} The debate over 187 centered on questions such as “who is entitled to or deserving of US social services?” and “are Californians’ tax dollars supporting ‘our’ children and their futures?” and claims including undocumented workers and the services they provide are necessary for the state to continue functioning. As I will demonstrate in this chapter, both Proposition 187’s supporters and

\textsuperscript{57} Wilson, a two-term Republican governor, served from 1991 to 1999.

\textsuperscript{58} As I will demonstrate in greater detail, 187 supporters tended to downplay the role of race in exclusionary discourse, while 187 opponents were more likely to name race as a factor motivating attrition.

\textsuperscript{59} Legal challenges regarding Proposition 187’s constitutionality and enforcement were drawn out for nearly two decades. Days after voters passed the measure, a federal judge issued a temporary restraining order, with a permanent injunction issued in December 1994. A 1997 federal ruling deemed 187 unconstitutional; Governor Wilson appealed the ruling. However, his successor, Gray Davis, withdrew the appeal in 1997. In 2014, the state of California removed 187 references from state codes.
opponents heavily utilized economic logic as a rationale for (im)migrants’ inclusion or exclusion from the state by marking (im)migrants as either unwelcome, burdensome outsiders or hard-working, tax-payers pursuing the American Dream. With both supporters and opponents of 187 discussing the ballot initiative as an economic issue, questions about the role of race and racism were frequently downplayed, dismissed, or inadequately handled by both camps. Proposition 187 targeted “illegal aliens,” terminology political scholar Robin Dale Jacobson argues became synonymous with “Mexican” and “immigrant” in California (39), and relied on the conflation of “illegal” and “Mexican” to mark the latter as undesirable and prompt their exit from California by denying access to social services. Thus, while an enacted Proposition 187 would define and regulate the racial makeup of the state’s population, dominant public discourse surrounding 187 utilized racial scripts heavily coded in economic-based language in an effort to depict (im)migration reform as “a race-neutral phenomenon” (Jacobson viii).

The interconnectedness of 187’s economic and racial narratives is not a new argument, as scholars such as Jacobson, Daniel Martinez HoSang, Kent A. Ono, and John M. Sloop have made similar claims, as did a torrent of articles and op-ed columns published in California (and national papers) during pre- and post-voting debates. What I am interested in, and the question this chapter takes up, is how cultural texts such as films and novels extended, reinforced, or reinterpreted the “economics not race” logic advocated within dominant popular and political discourse surrounding 187. Noting that cultural texts, particularly narrative fiction, are generally consumed by a broader audience than most legislative documents, I review two texts—Joel Schumacher’s film *Falling Down* (1993) and T.C. Boyle’s novel *The Tortilla Curtain* (1995)—to

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60 Supporters of 187 were more likely to dismiss racial prejudice as a motivation for the measure. However, opponents’ efforts to “normalize” the undocumented population by emphasizing (im)migrants’ pursuit of the American Dream and contributions to the economy often overshadowed the role of race in 187 discourse.
evaluate how anti- and pro-(im)migrant cultural texts reinforced or challenged popular perceptions of (im)migration restriction as a “race-neutral phenomenon.” *Falling Down* depicts (im)migrants as a threat to native Los Angelenos (coded as white), whose economic interests the film paints as supreme to those of “newcomers.” By presenting economic concerns as the root of tension between US citizens and “foreigners” and as justification for the expulsion of (im)migrants, I argue the film advances an “economics not race” logic and disseminates this ethos into the public sphere, thus helping make “race-neutral” (im)migration restriction a familiar and palatable viewpoint during the Proposition 187 debates. Conversely, in *The Tortilla Curtain*, Boyle challenges the race-neutrality logic by showing the overlap between exclusionary economic logic and cultural racism.61 Underscoring this point, the novel features anti-(im)migrant characters advocating a “Save our State” stance—rooted in saving US social services and jobs for worthy US Americans—as well as seemingly pro-(im)migrant characters who articulate what I term a “Save our State [of Life]” position. The “Save our State [of Life]” characters support the (im)migrants until they pose a threat to their property values and gated communities. Boyle shows how (im)migration discourse declaring US citizens’ economic welfare as superior to (im)migrants’ well-being depends upon racial scripts marking “illegals” as undeserving, consequently rebuffing race-neutral claims.

**The Impetus behind “Economics not Race”**

The economic impact of undocumented (im)migrants on the US serves as the linchpin for historical and contemporary political and media treatments of undocumented (im)migration.62

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61 Eduardo Bonilla-Silva identifies cultural racism as one of the four frames of color-blind racism (28). This framework relies upon culturally-based arguments to explain and justify racial inequalities and the exclusion of people of color from white communities.

62 This is true historically, for example, as the repatriation of Mexicans and Mexican Americans during the Great Depression “made it perfectly clear to all that their status and rights in the US would be tenuous during bust times, essential during boom times, and eminently politicized at all times” (Mize and Swords xxxv).
This framework gains traction during periods of US economic crisis, with (im)migrants treated as financial units (whether risky or rewarding), which minimizes or suppresses other facets of their (im)migration experience and lives in the US as well as other rationales for (im)migrant rights. Commenting on the economic lens through which (im)migrants’ movement toward and presence in the US is assessed, sociologist Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo writes, “Mexican immigrant women and men are often referred to as ‘pools of immigrant labor’ or as ‘migrant streams’ or ‘waves’ responding solely to economic currents; such phrases provide a picture which flattens the varied contexts and experiences of migration” (34), which may include family reunification, pursuit of an education, or flight from political, religious, or sexual persecution. Political and cultural treatments of (im)migration as a fundamentally economic endeavor inform popular evaluations of (im)migrants’ presence and impact on the US, as evidenced by California newspapers’ coverage of Proposition 187, specifically, and undocumented (im)migration, broadly.

Economic-based justifications for (im)migrants’ exclusion, unlike those rooted in racial or cultural logic, often masquerade as racially-neutral ideologies. The portrayal of (im)migrants as outsiders who do not belong in California frequently revolved around the economic impact of (im)migrants on the state and its citizens.63 Supporters of 187 pointed to financial concerns, arguing California’s educational and health care systems and social services were crumbling, which they attributed to overuse and abuse by “illegals” living in the state. For example, an article published in the Santa Ana Orange County Register conveyed, “Prop. 187 stems from a

63 The depiction of undocumented (im)migrants as outsiders governed much of the pro-187 coverage offered within California newspapers. Some support also stemmed from popular belief that “illegal immigrants” could not or would not assimilate. For example, an editorial published in the November 29, 1994 edition of Ukiah Daily Journal following the passage of 187 reads, “This overwhelming tidal wave of illegal immigrants has no parallel in America’s past. These immigrants broke our laws to get here and now their rejection of assimilation has ended the tradition of the Statue of Liberty looking out over a vast melting pot” (K. Collins).
legitimate concern: illegal immigrants’ drain on hard-pressed public services” (“Three” 51). Spotlighting the negative financial implications of undocumented (im)migration allowed 187 supporters to suggest all undocumented people, regardless of race or national origin, could be construed as threatening and must be removed in order to protect public services and the citizens who use them, thus validating a race-neutral stance.

The Ukiah Daily Journal printed local Californians’ stance on 187, revealing the pervasive economic logic governing both support and resistance to the ballot initiative. Of the six responses featured in the segment “On the Streets of Ukiah,” four supporters drew upon economic-based logic to explain their position. Mack Ridgeway, identified as a truck driver from Ukiah, said, “I think it’s a good idea. They [undocumented (im)migrants] rob a lot from us American citizens and from people who are trying to get into the country legally.” Charles Maxfield, a laborer from Willits, said, “I agree with that [187] because they’re illegal. This is our country. They have no right coming here. They take our jobs and our money. If you weren’t born here, you don’t belong here.” This response conflates place of birth with citizenship and legal status. Further, both responses construct (im)migrants as taking what rightfully belongs to US (born) citizens, with the latter emphasizing jobs and money while also slipping into racial, ethnic, and nation-based exclusion. Resistance to (im)migrants’ presence in the US draws in part upon “the fear that immigrants will become ‘public charges’ and drain the state’s resources” (Nopper 217). Dominant economic narratives construct undocumented (im)migrants, particularly those arriving from Mexico or Latin American nations, as a threat to the financial security of the US and its citizens and marks them as undeserving and undesirable outsiders. Articulating this

64 Respondents were asked outside of the Ukiah Department of Motor Vehicles, “Do you favor or oppose Proposition 187?”
ideology, Virginia Hammond, a staff associate from Ukiah, indicated her support for 187, “I’m a native Californian. Send them home. We pay taxes. We should benefit.” Finally, Joy Hard, a homemaker from Willits also focused on taxes and argued, “We need to take care of our children first. We pay our taxes” (A-7). Each of the interviewees paint the undocumented population as an economic drain who do not pay taxes, “rob” citizens of jobs and money, or unjustifiably benefit from social systems supported by US citizens’ tax dollars. These brief statements of support for 187 also depict the undocumented as suspicious and mark (im)migrants as outsiders and racial others, which I discuss in greater detail below.

Just as 187 supporters turned to economic logic to justify their support for the ballot measure, some opposing 187 framed their resistance in economic terms. For example, Laguna Beach school board officials opposed the measure, as it would not only “bar children of illegal immigrants from public schools” but cost the district time and money to “verify and report the immigration status of all students and their parents and report ‘reasonably suspected’ families” (Diamond). The Laguna school board took an official stance against the measure, but cited the cost of enforcing (im)migration laws as the impetus, rather than questioning the basis in which they might “reasonably suspect” a family of being “illegal immigrants.”65 Meanwhile, the topic of taxes, a regular theme in pro-187 rhetoric, also appeared in oppositional rhetoric. The sole dissenting respondent in the Ukiah Daily Journal survey, Donna Harman, a homemaker from Hopland, stipulated, “I’m against it [187]. The reason the illegal people are coming here is to do work that other people don’t want to do. They’re people just like we are. They pay taxes just like

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65 In a similar vein, newspaper coverage also addressed the high cost of funding ballot propositions. Journalist Sandy Harrison noted 187 “was put on the ballot by the Republican Party and several Republican politicians, who have already spent more than $500,000 on the measure.” Some 187 opponents objected to the money spent in support of the initiative, and challenged the pro-187 fiscal responsibility rhetoric, without critiquing its intentions.
everybody else” (A-7). While Herman challenges economic-based stereotypes about undocumented (im)migrants draining the state’s social services and hurting the economy, she nonetheless uses the dehumanizing term “illegal” to describe this cohort, which in the US is frequently treated as synonymous with Mexican (Jacobson 39), thus reinscribing (im)migrants as racial outsiders. Further, neither of these denunciations stems from concerns that racial prejudice fuels 187 or that supporters call for undocumented (im)migrants’ exclusion. The fact that some people on both sides of the issue accepted that Proposition 187 was a purely economic and not racially-motivated legislative measure further quashed assertions that racial discrimination fueled 187.

Responding to sociologist Stephen Small’s call for evaluating how ‘‘racialized’’ hostility operates “alongside a broad array of economic and political factors” (47), I have offered a brief overview of how economic-based exclusionary language targeting (im)migrants obscures the role of race in (im)migration-themed discourse. Fiscal concerns play a central role in 187 marking poor, unskilled, undocumented (im)migrants as undesirable, a threat to US citizens’ access to jobs and social services, and an economic drain due to monies spent by the state government on “illegal immigration.” Yet, as legal scholar Kevin R. Johnson argues, concerns about economics often draw upon fears of the racialized “Other.” To this end, Johnson writes,

66 Although economic-based evaluations of 187 inform much of the conversation, questions about the role of race and racism are taken up. For example, journalist Sandy Harrison summarized the position of some 187 opponents, noting, “Opponents, led by Latino groups, teachers unions and health care groups, say the measure is racist and unconstitutional.” Randy Foster, then-editor of Ukiah Daily Journal, argued in his rejection of 187 that “California agriculture has relied on Mexican laborers for decades, but suddenly that’s a major problem? The only ones it’s a problem for (in reality, as opposed to perception) are some Republicans, a mixed bag of white supremacists and those inclined to listen to and believe propaganda.”

67 Ronald L. Mize and Alicia C.S. Swords describe the broader and historical cultural acceptance that (im)migrants steal US citizens’ jobs. They note that union groups such as “AFL-CIO took a reactionary position in the hearing leading up to the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 by adopting the line that illegal immigrants were competing for union jobs and their presence was depressing wage scales, undercutting union demands for wage hikes, allowing themselves to be used as strikebreakers, etc.” (69).
“Many, especially in the Southwest, who complain about illegal immigration are in fact objecting to illegal immigration from Mexico. The stereotypical ‘illegal alien’ is a Mexican who has snuck into the United States in the dark of night. The image in the minds of many is that of a poor, brown, unskilled, young male” (389). The exclusion of the “poor, brown, unskilled” (im)migrant, as covertly directed by 187, draws upon the fears and popular misconceptions that (im)migrants abuse US social services. While this misconception circulates in political and popular rhetoric demanding (im)migrants’ expulsion, it does not reflect reality. Countering the misconception of social service overuse, Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo explains, “Immigrants are considerably less likely than the native born to receive public assistance. As a group, Mexican immigrants underutilize public services; this is especially true of undocumented immigrants, who fear apprehension and deportation” (170). The entanglement of economic- and race-based narratives in the 187 legislation and discourse surrounding it signifies the multiple and intersecting ways undocumented (im)migrants are perceived as a threat to the US, even if couched in economic claims and resistance.

Proposition 187 demonstrates the state’s commitment to using an economics-based discourse in justifying the race-based exclusion of undocumented (im)migrants. The newspaper coverage shows how the “economics not race” mentality shifted from political to popular rhetoric. I turn to Falling Down and The Tortilla Curtain to evaluate how narrative fiction adopted, extended, or challenged “economics not race” logic as part of the stories deemed worth telling and knowing about how undocumented (im)migration effected the lives of US citizens in

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68 Despite this stereotype only 39% of total undocumented (im)migrants are from Mexico—with others originating from Canada and Poland in large numbers (K. Johnson 389).
Although both sites of analysis are narrative fiction and thus labeled as creative works, with disclaimers that any resemblance to actual people or events is purely coincidental, they invite audience members to identify with and even root for the protagonist or heroine, which I argue increases the likelihood of audiences adopting an “economics not race” mentality. Tom Doherty of *Cinéaste* wrote in a review of *Falling Down*, “once cinema has locked and loaded ninety minutes worth of spectator identification, it’s difficult not to go along for the full ride, to partake of the sheer adrenaline rush of letting off steam and blowing all circuits, the palpable enjoyment of savoring, with the protagonist, that oh so-rare morning when everything is permissible” (41). When spectators and readers “go along for the full ride,” or even just a portion of it, it is important to evaluate the messages promoted by the texts along the way, especially the “economics not race” missive. For, as literary scholar Jakob Lothe reminds us, just because a text is fictional, “This does not at all imply that we cannot learn something important by reading and working with narrative fiction” (5). And so, throughout the remainder of this chapter, I read the film and novel as offering audiences the experience of identifying with players in the debate around undocumented (im)migration in the 1990s.

What becomes visible in my analysis is how Joel Schumacher’s *Falling Down* (1993) projects similar logic as 187 and how T.C. Boyle’s *The Tortilla Curtain* (1995) both extends and challenges the logic of 187. Schumacher’s *Falling Down* does not specifically address undocumented (im)migration or the US-Mexico border and it premiered the year before

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69 Narrative fiction offers a useful access point to discern social attitudes (in this case, attitudes and sentiments about undocumented (im)migration), as it reveals a range of complex and competing attitudes and shows the way emotional appeals work to shape discourse. Establishing the link between text and social attitudes, literary scholar Jakob Lothe argues, “If...reading is a social activity that is influenced by the society beyond the author and reader, then it is important to study narrative texts as diverse manifestations of such social activity” (viii).
Californians voted on Proposition 187. Yet, the film’s treatment of middle-class men as victims of an economic downturn underscores how material conditions contribute to and help shape economic-based rationale for the exclusion of those deemed a threat to the US, particularly those perceived as not belonging. Meanwhile, *The Tortilla Curtain*, a generally pro-(im)migrant text, shows how (im)migrants are deemed unwelcome, out-of-place, and a threat by affluent US citizens. Boyle’s anti-(im)migrant characters draw upon “Save our State” logic in espousing an “economics not race” rationale for (im)migrants’ exclusion. Offering a twist on the anti/pro-(im)migrant divide, Boyle shows affluent and liberal “pro-(im)migrant” characters articulating a similar “economics not race” philosophy, or what I refer to as “Save our State [of Life]” rhetoric, when arguing for (im)migrants’ inclusion (on the basis of human rights and racial inclusiveness) as long as their presence does not diminish property values in elite neighborhoods (the logic of cultural racism). I argue Boyle points to the shared logic motivating “Save our State” and “Save our State [of Life]” in order to show how “economics not race” logic is not a race-neutral stance, thus critiquing liberals and conservatives who employ color-blind rhetoric. Further, through these sources, I examine how both texts make sense of class- and economic-based framework for dealing with undocumented (im)migration in the US and reveal dominant messages about people’s worth, contribution, and value as understood in economic terms.

**Falling Down: Blaming “Foreigners” for the Decline of the US Middle-Class**

Joel Schumacher’s crime drama, *Falling Down* (1993), depicts transnational human and capital (im)migration as destructive to white, middle-class men’s status in 1990s US America. Starring Michael Douglas as William Foster, the film centers on Foster’s frustrations over losing his job and his inability to provide financially for his daughter. Incensed by a series of conflicts with “foreigners,” and feeling out of place in his home city of Los Angeles, Foster launches a
series of economically- and racially-motivated assaults across the city. Though he attacks, injures, and kills several people (primarily men of color), Foster considers himself a victim. Having recently lost his job as a defense-industry worker, Foster believes the US government has abandoned middle-class, hard-working men and that “foreigners” unduly profit from the US marketplace and control public space. Foster sees himself as a victim rightfully claiming the life “owed” to him (as a white male citizen), and he reacts with surprise and anger upon learning others perceive him and his actions as racially-motivated and antagonistic toward people of color. The film’s narrative arc coincides with the economic logic of Proposition 187, with Schumacher portraying Foster as the wronged “everyman” whose economic interests are compromised by “foreigners” who exert too much control over US economic and social spaces.\textsuperscript{70} Although Foster’s behavior becomes violent and irrational, he is partially redeemed during an ending scene when he sacrifices his life for his daughter’s financial security. Thus, the film condemns his actions, but legitimizes his motivations and confirms the need for real “wronged everymen” to react to the threats facing the US nation-state.

By using Foster’s unraveling to argue the US must protect its citizens’ social, political, and economic rights, the film presages popular descriptions of 187 as legislation focused on “reinstitutionalizing the supremacy of native interests, not…the race of either the natives or the newcomers” (Jacobson 29).\textsuperscript{71} Further, in constructing Foster as a rightfully-aggrieved man whose motivations differ from the racist neo-Nazi he encounters on his rampage, \textit{Falling Down} validates the notion that “native interests” have nothing to do with race, thus depicting the anti-

\textsuperscript{70} \textit{Falling Down} premiered before California voters were introduced to Proposition 187. However, the film participates in a similar public and popular discourse to 187, which marks “foreigners” as an economic threat to middle-class US citizens.

\textsuperscript{71} Having interviewed 31 individuals about their support for 187, Jacobson notes in \textit{The New Nativism} (2008) that many supporters argue the measure supports native interest and does not focus on race.
(im)migrant tirade as race-neutral. However, I argue Proposition 187 and Falling Down similarly treat native Los Angelenos (coded as white) and their interests as supreme to those of “newcomers” (depicted in the film as Korean and Latino) challenging the popular rhetoric that native supremacy, even if rooted in economics, is not about racial identity.

In the wake of the film’s 1993 release, critics reviewed Falling Down and frequently treated Foster as the wronged everyman, constituted by his male, middle-class identity; his whiteness or racial identity is rarely mentioned. Supporting Foster as the “everyman,” several critics described Foster’s violent rampage as both thrilling and even justified. For example, Washington Post critic Hal Hinson characterized Foster as “a kind of nerd Schwarzenegger, complete with black combat fatigues and rocket launcher.” Further indicating, “This is how Schumacher would like us to see D-FENS [Foster’s pseudonym] at this stage in the story -- as the vigilante superhero of our common frustrations.” Also reading Foster as a figure for vigilante justice, Vincent Canby of the New York Times argued that the protagonist “repays a few of the random injustices he has been collecting throughout his adult life. He’s a hard-working, tax-paying, politically concerned, white, middle-class American male, and his patience has run out.” Canby frames Foster as an innocent victim of “random injustices,” suggesting audiences should identify and sympathize with this “hard-working” man. In both reviews, the critics depict Foster as a man who refuses to accept the inequalities lobbed at him by an unjust society. These reviews told viewers who Foster was and explained why they could identify with this “superhero,” but failed to name or evaluate the specific injustices he faced, simply naming them as “common frustrations” of tax-paying, middle-class, US American men. This omission of specific injustices in the reviews reveals the nebulous language used to unite “hard working, tax-paying, politically
concerned” US citizens disillusioned by their perceived lack of political or economic clout, regardless of the “random injustice” faced.

For the reviewers, the unnamed injustices and frustrations Foster faced (as the everyman) were clearly real, but the audience’s identification with and support for Foster are short-lived by design. Over the course of the film, the “superhero” quickly becomes the fringe lunatic, and reviewers’ attitude toward the protagonist changes. Hal Hinson departs from his initial “vigilante superhero” assessment of Foster and explains, “It also turns out that D-FENS isn’t as much of an Everyman as he was first made out to be. It seems that he had a history of violent behavior, and so instead of being a movie about an average guy who snaps, “Falling Down” is about a nut case pretending to be an average guy who snaps.” Hinson carefully differentiates between an “average guy who snaps” and a “nut case,” suggesting the former would be justified in his actions. Hinson condemns the violent rampage, but does not invalidate the larger socioeconomic conditions spurring Foster. Vincent Canby adds to the thorny relationship many critics have with Foster and *Falling Down*. While Canby concedes, “The character’s background is that of thousands of other men who don’t go to pieces, at least not in such an irretrievable way,” he also argues that ““Falling Down” is not meant to be seen as the anatomy of a madman, but as a spectacle of civil despair in which some people give in to galvanizing self-pity and others cope as best they can.”

Contrasting Hinson’s characterization of Foster as a “nut case,” Canby identifies Foster’s descent into violence as the consequence of his poor-coping skills and inability to “man up” in a state of crisis. Canby ultimately depicts Foster as merely a poor facsimile of the average man who faces “random injustices” but bears them stoically. Canby’s reading suggested that while Foster’s issues were the same as the average citizens, Foster was not; so, audiences can condemn his
particular reaction while confirming the need for the real “wronged everyman” to react.\textsuperscript{72}

Focusing on Foster’s unhinged mental state, history of violence, or identifying him as a weak-willed man, each of these reviews ultimately rejects readings of Foster as the maltreated hero. Critics therefore validate Foster’s frustrations and injustices faced as real, while also denouncing him as a dangerously unstable madman. While Foster may be a “nut job,” the issues plaguing him as “a hard-working, tax-paying, politically concerned, white, middle-class American male” are all too real according to Schumacher and the critics, which I will address in my analysis of the film. Ultimately, critics and the film’s narrative dismiss Foster’s abusive rampage as a viable solution for responding to the social and economic injustices plaguing hard-working, tax-paying citizens.

While critics grappled with the film’s portrayal of Foster as the wronged everyman and a fringe lunatic, their analysis of his issues and frustration focused almost solely on economics (hard-working, but out of work; a tax-payer who can no longer provide child support). Race and questions of racism rarely appeared in popular reviews. Noting the dearth in popular and critical analysis of the interconnectedness of race and economics, along with critic Jonathan Rosenbaum’s pointed argument that the “string of violent though petty wish fulfillments…is cynically contrived to exploit male middle-class dissatisfactions without exploring the basis for any of them” (\textit{Chicago Reader}), I evaluate the factors motivating Foster’s dissatisfaction and violent rampage (as identified by the film). I argue that through Foster’s fixation on the US economic system failing US citizens, the film makes a contentious statement about race in

\textsuperscript{72} Offering a critique in line with Hinson and Canby, Tom Doherty for \textit{Cinéaste} also acknowledged the shift from celebrating Foster as the sympathetic victim to the deranged lunatic. He wrote, “Having enticed spectators into identification with the mad avenger, Schumacher presumably intends participant observers to fall away from the vigilante posse at some point, as the true depth of DFENS’s derangement becomes clear, as the estranged husband, devoted father, and beset Everyman exposes himself as a trigger happy stalker and abusive father.” (41).
contemporary US America, namely that “foreigners” are the root cause of hard-working, middle-class men feeling irrelevant in the 1990s. This stance mirrors the surface-level “economics not race” logic later advanced by Proposition 187, which designated undocumented (im)migration as problematic but asserted anti-(im)migrant stances were race-neutral.

*Falling Down* does not specifically address undocumented (im)migration or the US-Mexico border. For a project focused on cultural representations of undocumented (im)migrants, this initially makes the film a strange site of analysis. However, *Falling Down* sets the stage for evaluating the relationship between economics and anti-(im)migrant sentiment. As (im)migration attorney Ira J. Kurzban establishes, “it is not possible to understand anti-immigrant views in the United States today without also understanding the forces that have destabilized both the middle class and the institutions that traditionally formed the bulwark of democracy in this country” (63). Thus, in my analysis of *Falling Down*, I show how director Joel Schumacher constructs middle-class, US American men as deserving economic success based upon class and national status (without direct reference to race). Further, the film’s narrative suggests these men increasingly face competition from “foreigners” living and working in the US while receiving no financial assistance or protection from the US government.

In support of this argument, I demonstrate how Michael Douglas’ character, William Foster, reads “foreigners” as thieves who steal from his country. Foster contends they not only profit economically while US citizens suffer, but also erode cultural and linguistic traditions, suggesting a social theft, which mirrors the rationale upholding Proposition 187 and reveals the interconnectedness of economic logic and cultural racism. Additionally, I discuss the prevailing narrative of US Americans being priced out of their country, preventing citizens from competing or remaining economically viable. Following these economic narratives, I assess the film’s
message that US citizens must reclaim their place (in this case, Los Angeles) from “foreigners” who are treated as unwelcome and unwanted. This also foreshadows Proposition 187 which sought to deny undocumented (im)migrants’ access to social service with the intent that this population would leave the state, allowing citizens to reclaim “their” place and space. Finally, I show how the film encourages US citizens to fight back. The film’s prevailing messages—(im)migrants’ steal from and profit in the US and that such “theft” requires direct action in order to protect national supremacy—mirror the economic concerns detailed in 187, though the film’s turn to violence offers an amplified version of the legislation’s proposed solutions of penalizing, restricting, and/or removing foreigners living in the US.

\textit{Foreigners “Stealing” from the US}

Depressed by his recent job loss and inability to find employment, Foster fears he cannot compete economically and worries his inability to participate in the US marketplace constitutes his failure as a US American male provider. As the film progresses, he identifies new targets to blame for these insecurities. The film’s first violent interaction pits Foster against a Korean convenience store owner.\(^{73}\) In a review of \textit{Falling Down}, historian Callum MacDonald comments on this scene, arguing it “stands as a metaphor for the fears of a white elite threatened by ethnic change and economic competition from the countries of the Pacific Rim.” I agree with MacDonald’s assessment of the scene, as the film posits that US national supremacy and citizen’s economic stability are compromised by “ethnic change.” Extending this argument, I argue the filmmakers’ and film’s narrative maintain that the suppression or expulsion of “foreign” economic competitors is not racially motivated.

\(^{73}\) From the scene, it is unclear whether the man is a clerk (and paid by the hour) or the store’s owner. The subtitles and credits offer no clarifying information. I refer to him as the owner throughout my analysis.
The scene with the store owner is set up as a simple economic exchange. Foster enters the store in order to “get some change for the phone [booth].” The owner stands at the counter with the register already open, but informs Foster, “No change; have to buy something,” and proceeds to slam the register shut. Through this brief exchange, the film establishes the owner as unfriendly and unreasonable; and, refusing a basic courtesy symbolizes the owner’s cultural illiteracy. Exacerbated, Foster slams his briefcase on the counter, walks to a cooler, and pulls out a soda. Upon hearing the soda costs 85 cents, he becomes increasingly aggravated, remarking “that doesn’t give me enough money for the phone call.” Rejecting the set price, Foster tells the owner, “I’ll give you 50 cents you give me 50 cents change.” This effort to negotiate the cost of the soda underscores Foster’s sense of entitlement rooted in white privilege. Yet, he feels his privilege being eroded and berates the owner for the seemingly over-priced item and the man’s inability to “properly” speak English, thus infusing a supposedly economic dispute with cultural racism. Irate over what he perceives as economic and cultural theft, Foster yells, “You come to my country. You take my money. You don’t even have the grace to learn how to speak my language.” Foster’s use of “my” in each of the accusatory statements underscores his sense of ownership and rightful claim on the nation, his own economic resources, and the English language. However, he sees this ownership diminishing and feels threatened by the storeowner. Foster criticizes the man for living in his country, taking his money, and butchering his language. Each of these sentiments outwardly establishes the owner as a foreigner and a threat to Foster’s economic power and supremacy as a citizen. However, Foster does not directly argue for an
entitled position based upon white supremacy. Instead, he disparages the owner for being culturally illiterate or inferior (i.e. not speaking or behaving as an “American,” per Foster’s standards as a white, middle-class man), which contributes to his mismanagement of the store. This shift reframes the dispute as economically-motivated.

Foster attempts to assert his dominance over the owner, who he perceives as a cultural and national outsider profiting from US generosity. He questions, “You have any idea how much money my country has given your country?” Foster subsequently looks foolish when the owner presses for an answer and he can only muster a vague reply of “I don’t know, but it’s gotta be a lot. You can bet on that.” Foster’s unsubstantiated claim that Korea/Koreans owe a debt (of gratitude and actual money) to the US draws upon racial scripts of Asians (treated as a homogenous group) profiting off of the US and negatively affecting US Americans economic prospects. Yet, he frames his aggression toward the storeowner as economically-driven, which encourages viewers to read his escalating aggression as a matter of economics, rather than as race-based violence. Having been refused service because of his belligerence, Foster attacks the shop owner, who has pulled a bat from under the counter. The two wrestle, and Foster tackles him to the ground, breaking merchandise in the process (including a glass jar containing small US flags).75 Foster grabs the bat; alarmed, the owner yells, “Take the money. Take the money.” Foster pauses and responds incredulously, “You think I’m a thief? No, you see, I’m not the thief. I’m not the one charging eight five cents for a stinking soda. You’re the thief. I’m just standing up for my rights as a consumer.” Angered by the cost of the soda, his inability to pay for it, and the “foreign” owner’s gainful employment, Foster argues he is acting on his interests.

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75 Although heavy-handed, the imagery of the US flag falling to the floor and its glass container shattering could be read as the American Dream crashing down or the US as broken.
as a consumer, once again framing his grievances and actions as economically-motivated.76

Accepting this reading, film critic Roger Ebert comments,

Because the character is white, and many of his targets are not, the movie could be read as racist. I prefer to think of it as a reflection of the real feelings of a lot of people who, lacking the insight to see how political and economic philosophies have affected them, fall back on easy scapegoating. If you don’t have a job and the Korean shop owner does, it is easy to see him as the villain. It takes a little more imagination to realize that you lost your job because of the greedy and unsound financial games of the go-go junk bond years.

Ebert’s analysis and dismissal of racism fails to take into account that the film consistently, though not exclusively, marks people of color as foreigners and Other. Foster not only attacks “foreigners,” but the narrative presents his actions as heroic and justified, as the shop owner does not appropriately value or respect the values and mores of US culture (according to Foster).

Crucially, Falling Down does not tell the story of a white, male, middle-class worker losing his job and self-worth as a result of “the greedy and unsound financial games of the go-go junk bond years.”77 With Foster as the protagonist and pseudo-superhero the narrative encourages the

76 Continuing his tirade, Foster informs the owner he’ll be “rolling back prices to 1965.” This date may be random, but 1965 is the year the US Congress passed the Hart-Cellar Act (or Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965), which abolished the national origins quota systems and symbolically opened (im)migration from Asian and African nations. The shop owner, who is from Korea, likely would not have been able to (im)migrate to the US before 1965, which Foster may identify as a more idyllic time in US history.

77 Hence, Ebert articulates the same economics-not-race (but still racist) logic that the film follows. In another relevant section of the review, Ebert warned readers, “Some will even find it racist because the targets of the film’s hero are African-American, Latino and Korean -- with a few whites thrown in for balance.” Ebert further suggested this misguided interpretation offers “a facile reading of the film, which is actually about a great sadness which turns into madness, and which can afflict anyone who is told, after many years of hard work, that he is unnecessary and irrelevant.” Just as quickly as Ebert draws race and racism into his review, he dismisses this reading and instead rationalizes the actions of a sad and mad hard-working man, demonstrating the supremacy of economic logic. Ebert’s nod to the film’s treatment of race and his focus on the irrelevancy felt by a hard-working man begs for a more sustained and critical analysis of the film’s handling of race and economics. Ebert gave Falling Down a three of four star rating.
audience to identify with, his treatment of “foreigners” as the problem and threat—and not the US financial sector driven by gross misconduct and corporate greed—underscores the importance of analyzing the racial logic embedded in the film’s economic-based narratives.

Reclaiming “Rightful” Space and Place

The economic and demographic changes in the US resulting from a globalized marketplace and workforce threaten Foster’s sense of self as a worker and provider. He feels economically vulnerable having lost his job to downsizing, technological advancements, and cheaper labor options. Additionally, Foster believes he is being pushed out of “his” space, which becomes another source for tension, conflict, and ultimately violence. Following his attack on the local storeowner, Foster continues his path of terror. While sitting on a concrete block in a seemingly deserted area, Foster examines the classified ads. He is quickly approached by two brown-skinned, Latino men who inform Foster he is trespassing and loitering on private property. The film’s subtitles and credits identify the men as “gang member 1” and “gang member 2.” The script not only denies these men first and last names, but draws upon US racial scripts designating Latinos as threatening, violent gang members, and outsiders in the community.78 Pro-187 rhetoric similarly names undocumented people—often cast as Mexican or Latino by politicians, pundits, and citizens alike—as nameless outsiders using space and resources meant for citizens or cultural insiders.

A conflict ensues between Foster and the “gang members.” Foster emphasizes his right to sit on the concrete block, indicating he did not “see any signs” forbidding his presence. Pointing

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78 Commenting on pervasive ideas that circulate about undocumented Mexicans in the debates on 187, Robin Dale Jacobson writes, “Mexcianness is characterized as lazy, but also as shiftless or underhandedly acquisitive” (76). While the “gang members” are not identified as Mexican (the broad nomenclature “Latino” is used), they are presented as suspicious, controlling, and dangerous.
to the spray-painted rock, one of the men questions, “what do you call that?” Foster refers to the sign as graffiti, but is informed the symbol indicates “this is fucking private property. No fucking trespassing. This means fucking you.” In a mocking tone, Foster questions, “It says all that? … maybe if you wrote in fucking English I could fucking understand it.” Foster’s rebuke implies the message is written in a language other than English; in reality, the rock is covered with symbols but no discernable words. He not only marks the signs as ineffective and inferior forms of communication, but rejects those who produce them (seemingly on the basis of language). Foster’s anger over “foreigners” inability or refusal to communicate in English aligns with support offered for Proposition 187. Robin Dale Jacobson argues supporters understood English “as essential to getting along, but more than that, English was seen as central to maintaining America” (104). When Foster expresses disbelief and anger that people living in his city/country fail to communicate in English, his condemnation conflates language with race. The Korean store owner and Latino “gang members” speak English, but Foster deems their communication unintelligible because he finds their presence unintelligible and objectionable within his conception of the US. These “unintelligible foreigners” initially wield greater power and cultural relevance in their respective spaces than Foster, which enrages him because the US is not being “maintained” in ways that protect his dominance and power as a white, middle-class, English-speaking, US American.

His series of encounters with “foreigners” shows that Foster holds less economic and cultural power than he is accustomed to, but he asserts his power and authority by declaring his right to sit idly on what he believes is public land. Questioning the reason for the dispute, he asks, “This is a gangland thing, isn’t it? We’re having a territorial dispute? I mean, I’ve wandered into your pissing ground…and you’ve taken offense by my presence. I understand
that. I mean, I wouldn’t want you people in my backyard either.” Foster’s commentary demonstrates he sees himself as different and better than “gangland” and its inhabitants. Although he does not want to interact with the men or remain in the space, he feels compelled to stand his ground\textsuperscript{79} and assert his right to claim the space (even if temporarily).\textsuperscript{80} After being threatened with a knife and told he will have to “pay a toll” for trespassing (his briefcase), Foster again becomes violent and uses his bat to attack the “gang members.” Commenting on race-based social conflict, sociologists Nella Van Dyke and Sarah Soule argue: “Increasing globalization and economic restructuring are having a negative economic impact on some segments of society, especially those that do not benefit economically from the changing economy. In locations where minority population levels are increasing, social conflict may ensue” (500). Foster intensifies the social conflict by conflating his removal from the work force (and resulting loss of pride, self-worth, and income) with the demands he leave “gangland.” Although the men are not responsible for Foster’s job loss or resulting breakdown, they bear the brunt of his anger over changing population demographics and economic conditions Foster believes disadvantage middle-class, educated, US men. Further, although Foster’s issues are framed as economic in nature, the basis for “solutions” centers on him asserting his dominance (as a citizen) over individuals who do not present a direct threat to him or his economic welfare, but whom he targets as scapegoats.

\textsuperscript{79} In an article on “stand-your-ground” laws, Elizabeth Chuck of NBC noted Florida passed the first “Stand-Your-Ground” in the US in 2005. These laws do not require citizens retreat when threatened (bodily harm, imminent death), and instead allows for the use of deadly force to protect oneself. In the film, Foster’s rampage would not (or should not) be protected by current iterations of these laws.

\textsuperscript{80} In response to the dispute, the investigating police officer questions, “What would a white guy in a white shirt and tie be doing in gangland?” Foster’s racial identity and class performance (as a presumed white-collar worker) mark him as out of place in a predominantly Latino-area of Los Angeles referred to as “gangland.”
“I’m Not a Vigilante”: Justifying “Race-Neutral” Resistance

Falling Down constructs Foster as a man committed to defending himself, his financial interests, and his country. In the opening sequence, viewers see a shot of Foster’s license plate, which reads “D-FENS.” As the narrative unfolds, the audience learns Foster builds missiles “to protect us from the communists,” and he believes his work in the defense industry helps “to protect America.” The latter sentiment fuels the narrative, as Foster seeks to defend himself against what he perceives as unfair economic practices and people encroaching on his territory.

Although Foster sees his issues as economically motivated, his violent rampages primarily target people of color, chiefly those he sees as foreign. Yet, the film repeatedly validates his “economics not race” logic, particularly by aligning Foster ideologically with a black male citizen and contrasting Foster’s behavior with that of a white, Neo-Nazi store-owner, whose overtly racist attitudes Foster rejects.

Walking the streets of Los Angeles reminds Foster others face similar fears and concerns, which enhances his level of despair but also emphasizes native citizens’ interests are widely compromised. He spots a black man standing outside a bank holding a sign that reads “not economically viable.” The protestor indicates he was refused a loan. As the police arrive to arrest him, the man shouts, “This is what happens if you’re not economically viable.” Identifying with the man’s despair, Foster questions his own economic viability, as he has lost his job in the defense industry. His job loss leaves Foster disillusioned; he worked to defend the US nation-state, and now feels no one will defend or protect his interests. Further, without a reliable income, Foster cannot afford child support payments and therefore cannot protect/support his

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81 His mother tells police officers this information as they search her home. Foster worked at a defense plant before losing his job.
daughter, signifying a threat to white patriarchy. Reflecting upon his lack of financial security, Foster notes, “I’m over-educated. Under-skilled. Maybe it’s the other way around. I forget… I’m not economically viable. I can’t even support my own kid.” His personal economic stress is compounded by concerns of a systematic economic downturn that is destroying the US middle-class, as demonstrated through bank protestor. Schumacher aligns Foster with the black, male, economically devastated citizen through their presumed common citizenship status (rather than racial identity), thereby emphasizing Foster’s (and the film’s) “race-neutral” attitude.

The film also validates the economic and protectionist narratives by contrasting Foster’s ideologies with those of a white supremacist. After Foster holds hostage fast food restaurant workers for refusing to serve him breakfast during the lunch hour (again stressing that he believes he is entitled to or owed particular services and options), he walks into an army-navy surplus store run by the white supremacist. The man has been listening to reports of Foster’s rampage across the city on his police scanner. He is captivated by Foster’s actions and hides him from police searching the area. Puzzled by the protection he receives, Foster questions the man’s motivations. The white supremacist responds,

I’m with you. Don’t you get it? I was listening to the police scanner. I heard about the Whammy Burger. Fucking fantastic. It was a bunch of niggers, wasn’t it? On TV it’s always nice looking white kids, but when you go in there it’s nothing but a bunch of fuckin’ niggers. And they’ll spit on your food if you’re not nice to them. I know. I know all about it. I’m with you. We’re the same you and me. We’re the same.

Taken aback and clearly horrified by the comparison, Foster replies, “We are not the same. I’m an American. You’re a sick asshole.” Dismissing shared motivations or ideologies suggests Foster does not seek his attacks on the Korean storeowner or Latino gang members as rooted in
race- or nation-based prejudice. He depicts himself as “an American,” implicitly defines US American as not racist, and establishes throughout the film that he is asserting his rights (as a consumer in the store and at the restaurant and as a citizen who can walk freely throughout his city) and seeking respect and economic justice. Foster believes he is fighting back against an unfair economic system and merely defending himself, his rights, and his place within the nation. And, the film sides with him by constructing its protagonist as a disillusioned but well-intentioned patriarch who becomes unhinged. The narrative distinguishes Foster from the “true” racist: the white supremacist store owner who collects Nazi paraphernalia. Foster rejects the Nazi paraphernalia and weaponry the storeowner tries to gift him and refers to the man as a “sick asshole.” When asked “What kind of vigilante are you?,” Foster answers, “I am not a vigilante. I am just trying to get home for my little girl’s birthday.” The film marks Foster’s presence, ideologies, and motivations as different—rooted in defense of self and nation rather than the racial, ethnic, or religious persecution of others.

*Falling Down* establishes middle-class men as the primary victims of an economic depression: those who have the most to lose and must resist and fight back. Foster sees himself as a victim, and is shocked to learn the police and his ex-wife see him as threatening. He questions, “I’m the bad guy? How’d that happen?” and explains, “I did everything they told me to. Did you know I build missiles? I help to protect America. You should be rewarded for that.” Foster emphasizes he played by the rules and expected to be rewarded financially, but instead lost his job and status as an economic provider and contributor. Throughout the film, Foster seeks to reclaim his power as a parent, provider, and citizen, but is continually mystified and angered by those he sees as getting in the way. Unsuccessful at reclaiming economic power for himself, Foster commits to protecting his daughter’s future. In a showdown with a police officer,
he indicates there are “two choices: I can kill you, or you can kill me and my little girl can get the insurance.” Foster draws his weapon (a water gun) and is shot and killed. His desire to protect his daughter’s future and support her financially partially redeems him as the film concludes.

While the film ultimately deems his actions deplorable, this partial redemption reinforces his struggle as real and validates the message that the nation-state’s economic viability must be protected at all costs. Until the end of his life, Foster clings to the notion that economic prosperity ensures freedom, protection, and opportunity; yet, the everyday US Americans’ prosperity dwindles as the result of undeserving newcomers—a popular perspective that ultimately fueled support for Proposition 187.

**The Tortilla Curtain: Undocumented (Im)migrants Threaten Affluent US America**

Published in 1995, T.C. Boyle’s *The Tortilla Curtain* captures a glimpse of Californians’ varied perspectives on undocumented (im)migration in the 1990s, just a year after the passage of Proposition 187. In contrast to *Falling Down*, which presents a fictionalized account of a formerly middle-class man facing financial collapse in an increasingly transnational world, Boyle’s novel focuses on how transnational (im)migration dramatically affects the economic status and opportunities of affluent US citizens and impoverished undocumented (im)migrants. While the novel does not directly reference 187, Boyle’s affluent characters—whether espousing anti- or pro-(im)migrant viewpoints—utilize much of the “Save our State” rhetoric connected to the Proposition 187 campaign. Elite, anti-(im)migrant characters express their commitment to protecting US citizens’ jobs, access to social services, and US national supremacy. This stance mirrors 187 supporters’ commitment to “saving” the state’s economic system and social services. Meanwhile, seemingly liberal and pro-(im)migrant characters convey, what I refer to as, a “Save
our State [of Life]” mentality. They support (im)migrants’ rights as long as the latter’s presence
does not negatively alter elites’ way of life. Like anti-(im)migrant, “Save our State” rhetoric, this
stance privileges economics, though it draws upon cultural racism to justify (im)migrants’
exclusion when property values fall or neighborhoods are deemed unsafe. Both the pro- and anti-
perspectives construct undocumented (im)migration as an economic and cultural issue, which
minimizes the racial logic behind calls for (im)migrants’ exclusion. Proposition 187’s economic
impulse called for protecting the “everyman.” Boyle, however, removes the “everyman” figure
from the discourse in order to pinpoint how “Save our State” (and the mutated “Save our State
[of Life]”) worked to protect the property values, way of life, and security of prosperous
Californians against the threat of foreigners. I argue The Tortilla Curtain exposes how 187’s
emphasis on undue hardship for the “everyman” functioned to suppress the discriminatory class
and racial logic fueling the ballot initiative, demonstrating that “Save our State” (and subsequent
mainstream discourse) was inherently a racial project.

Throughout The Tortilla Curtain, Boyle shows how (im)migrants are deemed
unwelcome, out-of-place, and a threat by affluent US citizens, including many self-proclaimed
liberals who champion racial inclusiveness but support exclusive economic policies that force
undocumented (im)migrants from their neighborhoods. Underscoring this point, the novel offers
two different yet intersecting narratives about the perceived consequences of undocumented
(im)migration to the US. The Tortilla Curtain tells the stories of Delaney Mossbacher and
Cándido Rincón. Delaney and his wife, both US citizens, live in a gated community in Topanga
Canyon (California), a place he initially describes as “intimidating and exclusionary,
antidemocratic even” (41). Delaney’s liberal and democratic convictions lead him to initially
support (im)migrants’ rights and idealize a multicultural community. Yet, as (im)migrants
increasingly engage in day-labor contracts instead of longer-term employment and seek work beyond urban environments, they enter Los Angeles’ suburbs or gated communities, leading to undesirable and unexpected contact between impoverished (im)migrants and affluent US citizens such as Delaney. His humanist convictions fade after he hits Cándido, an undocumented (im)migrant from Mexico, with his car. Delaney becomes increasingly suspicious of Latino-looking individuals who he believes are creating havoc in his world (ruining his favorite hiking spots or creating wildfires that threaten his property). Conversely, although Cándido also lives with his wife (América) in the US, their circumstances differ considerably from Delaney’s lifestyle. Cándido and América recently entered the country in search of work, and set up a temporary home in a ravine until they can save money for an apartment. Badly injured from the car accident, Cándido is unable to work, forcing his pregnant wife to seek employment. In contrast to Delaney’s comfortable and secure station, Cándido and América struggle to find work, food, shelter and avoid being spotted by law enforcement officials, while coping with unexpected race-based antagonism.

My summary and later analysis of the novel focus on the “economics not race” mentality advanced by characters who support and oppose the presence of undocumented (im)migrants in their state and community. Conversely, many reviews of The Tortilla Curtain lack a direct and sustained analysis of the race-based ideologies motivating both pro- and anti-(im)migrant perspectives articulated in the novel. Instead, reviewers tend to focus on the cultural conflict deriving from the economic chasm that divides Delaney (the elite US citizen) and Cándido (the impoverished outsider) or how race marks the major characters’ bodies and shapes their experiences in vastly different ways. For example, in his review of The Tortilla Curtain, Steve Brzezinski indicates Boyle “has written an impassioned novel about cultural collision in
Southern California.” Brzezinski acknowledges the cultural collision is underscored by the (im)migrant couple’s coming to terms with the “brutal reality of a country that either denies their existence or seeks to make them invisible,” and further notes, “Their tragedy is that they ask for so little, yet receive even less.” Brzezinski’s analysis underscores the unequal distribution of wealth and resources in the US and that possessing so little economic power leaves (im)migrants’ largely voiceless and invisible. Brzezinski also argues affluent US Americans’ “abhorrence [of (im)migrants] is fundamentally on aesthetic rather than behavioral grounds. The illegals are loathed…because they mar the beauty of the landscape with their rag-tag clothes and pathetic possessions. Their real crime is that they are bad for property values.” I agree with Brzezinski’s analysis, which points to but does not name the cultural logics of race, but also see it as incomplete. The affluent characters reject (im)migrants on the basis of class (marked by “rag-tag clothes and pathetic possessions”) and embedded racial scripts (“illegals” who do not fit the community’s “aesthetic”).

Whereas Brzezinski analyzes the economic divide separating the novel’s major characters and addresses (im)migrants’ impact on the elite, Heike Paul considers how Boyle uses race and class to shape perceptions of the characters. Paul writes, “I see Cándido’s and América’s bodies as incorporating their otherness in terms of poverty and ethnicity, portrayed with a distinct flavor of primitivism and exoticism. By contrast, Delaney’s and Kyra’s bodies appear as highly vergesellschaftet, signifying ‘civilization’ and a certain living standard as well as, more particularly, a certain social and cultural milieu” (262). Like Brzezinski, Paul acknowledges the divisions between Delaney/Kyra and Cándido/América, though he moves beyond class divisions by also considering the role of ethnicity. However, Paul’s article does not interrogate the novel
within its cultural milieu or evaluate Boyle’s take on US (im)migration-themed discourse, thus overlooking the similarity in pro- and anti-(im)migrant rhetoric.

Through my analysis of *The Tortilla Curtain*, I pinpoint similarities between the novel’s anti-(im)migrant characters’ rhetoric and public support for California’s Proposition 187, arguing T.C. Boyle exposes the racial scripts that infiltrate dominant discourse on undocumented (im)migration. I illustrate how these border defense narratives (like those in favor of Proposition 187) monetize an individual’s worth and contribution, deeming undocumented (im)migrants worthless and an economic liability (and by extension a racial liability). I also contend that Boyle’s anti-(im)migrant characters employ the logic of “economics not race” in framing their resistance to undocumented (im)migration. My goal is to demonstrate how the economics not race logic guiding popular (im)migration rhetoric is in fact deeply racist, which I argue Boyle is both aware and critical of throughout the novel. And, his critique extends to pro-(im)migrant voices that overtly challenge race-based ideologies supporting (im)migrants’ exclusion, thus positioning themselves as progressive allies, but also subscribes to and promotes economic exclusion. Through the character of Delaney, Boyle shows how seemingly pro-(im)migrant and progressive affluent US citizens view (im)migrants as out-of-place and a threat to their way of life and property values. Boyle’s critical depiction of elite, liberal US citizens reveals how ostensibly pro-(im)migrant discourse promotes racial inclusiveness and economic exclusiveness. Yet, when class divisions are transgressed, the novel shows how racial exclusion undergirds both pro- and anti-(im)migrant rhetoric adopted by the elite. Finally, after establishing how “economic not race” logic governs both anti- and pro-(im)migrant rhetoric throughout the novel, just as it did in segments of the debate surrounding 187, I argue Boyle uses the Cándido and América storyline to highlight interconnectedness of race and class in US (im)migration discourse and
dominant treatments/perceptions of (im)migrants and expose the “economics not race” logic articulated in both the novel and public/political discourse as flawed and disingenuous.

Help (Not) Wanted: Economics and Anti-(Im)migrant Rhetoric

The anti-(im)migrant characters in *The Tortilla Curtain* explain their resistance to undocumented (im)migration in economic terms. Their focus on jobs, taxes, and overstretched US social services resembles the rhetoric espoused by supporters of Proposition 187.82 Further, these characters construct people’s worth, contribution, and value in economic terms, emphasizing individuals with minimal education, training, or (valuable) skills (and therefore no worth) have no place in the US. Pronouncements about (im)migrants’ economic worth(lessness) subtly incorporate pernicious racial scripts marking (im)migrants as threatening and inferior. I show how Boyle draws on recognizable anti-(im)migrant tropes, offering readers a familiar access point into US (im)migration discourse, and pokes holes in the “economics not race” reasoning.

Characters opposing undocumented (im)migration depict (im)migrants as an unnecessary labor pool and as threatening to US citizens seeking similar employment opportunities. During a neighborhood association meeting, Delaney’s neighbor, Jack Cherrystone, argues (im)migrants strip citizens of limited work opportunities. Cherrystone questions, “Why should we be providing jobs for these people [Mexican (im)migrants] when we’re looking at ten percent unemployment rate right here in California—and that’s for citizens” (192). Subscribing to the “economics not race” rationale, Cherrystone characterizes (im)migration as an economic issue—the search for employment—and makes a clear distinction between those deserving of US

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82 This anti-(im)migrant perspective also resembles William Foster’s stance in *Falling Down*.
employment opportunities and those not entitled. However, he names citizenship as the dividing line, rather than race, even as he uses the phrase “these people” to distinguish undeserving Mexican (im)migrants from worthy US citizens.

Furthering the “economics not race” rationale, another neighbor named Jack Jardine argues (im)migrants present an economic threat to a technologically advanced society (the US) with no need or room for unskilled “peasants” who ultimately exhaust the country rather than contribute to it. He informs Delaney, “The ones coming in through the Tortilla Curtain down there, those are the ones that are killing us. They’re peasants, my friend. No education, no resources, no skills—all they’ve got to offer is a strong back, and the irony is we need fewer and fewer strong backs every day because we’ve got robotics and computers and farm machinery” (101). Jardine’s commentary underscores the importance of contributing to society; however, he only understands contributions and value through economic terms, thus dismissing those who seemingly possess no education, resources, or skills the US deems valuable. Further, Jardine sees (im)migrants as offering no more than a “strong back” to the US, essentially coding them as brutes in contrast to sophisticated and civilized US citizens. Delaney’s neighbors position themselves as advocates for US citizens whose interests they believe are vulnerable due to the influx of Mexican (im)migrants who have made the area “look like fucking Guadalajara or something” (192), a comment that depends upon and perpetuates racist and classist stereotypes. Ultimately, Boyle does not validate this perspective. Instead, he uses Jardine and Cherrystone to

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83 Underscoring this point, Robin Dale Jacobson argues, “When we begin to interpret, however, what individuals mean by fairness regarding the labor market or how they perceive threats to the environment or culture, we frequently stumble on race-based understandings of these problems” (3).

84 The novel references a host of Delaney’s neighbors by name. Commenting on this narrative choice, literary critic Heike Paul writes, “Not all of these characters have a great narrative impact, but the simple fact that they are given names and identifiable presences establishes the white community as more diversified, in many ways also as more familiar to the reader than the anonymous groups of people inhabiting the borderlands” (263).
expose how support for 187, even if couched in economic concerns, is really about race, native supremacy, and keeping out the Other. Jardine and Cherrystone assume (im)migrants with limited education or technological skills are incompetent and incapable of contributing or adapting to the US, and they also presume that individuals who look and dress like (their perception of) peasants or day-laborers lack education.

Presenting additional consequences of (im)migrants seeking work in the US, the novel considers the social effects of (im)migrants settling beyond the border region. Treating undocumented (im)migration as a state and national issue pulls more US citizens into the discourse on undocumented (im)migration, which Boyle demonstrates by drawing upon dominant popular narratives that suggest all US citizens are affected by the sprawl of economic (im)migrants who drain US social services. For example, Kyra states, “there’s just so many of them [undocumented (im)migrants], they’ve overwhelmed us, the schools, welfare, the prisons and now the streets” (185). Kyra expresses concern about strained social services, but uses “us” and “them” language to mark US citizens as deserving insiders and (im)migrants as unworthy outsiders. In a similar vein, Jack Jardine questions, “Do you have any idea what these people are costing us, and not just in terms of crime, but in real tax dollars for social services?” and proceeds to inform, “the illegals in San Diego County…used up two hundred and forty million in services—welfare, emergency care, schooling and the like. You want to pay for that? And for the crime that comes with it?” (102). Jardine again frames his opposition to undocumented (im)migration in economic terms by highlighting the cost of “illegals” using US social services. However, he further integrates divisive, race-based opposition into this commentary, not only using terms such as “these people” and “illegals,” but connecting undocumented (im)migrants—who have been depicted as Mexican or Latino throughout the novel—as criminals. This stance
mirrors anti-(im)migrant rhetoric in both Proposition 187 and *Falling Down* that constructs “illegals” as criminals. Commenting on public concerns that (im)migrants compromise the strength and security of the US and its citizens, sociologist Tamara K. Nopper confirms fears that (im)migrants drain state resources “has continued to inform current debates about immigrants’ and refugees’ uses of welfare, as well as debates about the possibility of immigrants ‘importing’ crime to the United States” (217). Delaney’s neighborhood association clearly opposes (im)migrants’ presence and they collectively argue (im)migrants constitute a threat to the state’s economic viability and ability to provide necessary services to and keep its citizens safe from criminal activity.

(Im)migrants are not only treated as disastrous to US citizens’ job prospects and access to social services, but as an egregious threat to property values in elite neighborhoods near the border region (in this case, Topanga Canyon). Kyra indicates undocumented (im)migrants take over the area, they make the community (appear) less safe, and their presence leads to a drop in property values. She ponders, “Somebody had to do something about these people—they were ubiquitous, prolific as rabbits, and they were death for business” (158). Kyra’s anti-(im)migrant stance mirrors the arguments supporting 187, which portray (im)migrants as overrunning space and places designed for US citizens. Her resistance to (im)migrants also relies upon racist depictions of Latina women as hyper-fertile breeders, and serves as another instance of likening (im)migrants to beasts, though she focuses on what their presence means for US citizens’

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85 Sociologists Nella Van Dyke and Sarah Soule argue that perceived economic and social threats are seen as adversely effecting those “typically in more powerful positions…[as] groups that have some social power during one period, by virtue of their race or gender or class, may face a loss of power, or at least the perception that they are losing power, during another time period” (498).
businesses and property values. Reflecting upon possible solutions, Kyra informs her husband, “There had to be a limit, a boundary, a cap [on the number of (im)migrants seeking work], or they’d be in Calabasas next and then Thousand Oaks and on and on up the coast until there was no real estate left” (159). Of course, (im)migrants working as day-laborers are not buying the homes in the exclusive community. Instead, Kyra fears their presence will drive away potential buyers who she believes should have unadulterated access to the coastal gated communities and the separation they offer, thus highlighting exclusionary cultural logics of race.

In each of the selected examples of anti-(im)migrant sentiment, Boyle shows the white characters assessing (im)migrants’ worth and contributions in economic terms—with (im)migrants not only depicted as worthless, but a drain and threat to US citizens, their communities, and their way of life. Further, though the characters mark (im)migrants as economically undesirable, their rationale draws upon racial scripts designating Mexican (im)migrants as nothing more than (useless) brutes with “strong backs.” Boyle writes several characters adopting different arguments against undocumented (im)migration, showing that while anti-(im)migrant discourse has many strands, all are race- and economic-based.

The Role of Race in Pro-(Im)migrant “Save our State” Discourse

Boyle exposes the “economics not race” logic informing the anti-(im)migrant stance, but he does not critique or condemn this stance outright. *The Tortilla Curtain* was published the year following the intense coverage and passage of 187, with heated public debates on whether the ballot measure supported (im)migrants’ exclusion on the basis of race. Rather than merely enacting that debate, Boyle criticizes the terms of the conversation. He uses his protagonist—

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86 As discussed in chapter one, a body of scholarship devoted to racist rhetoric about Latina fertility exists. For example, Natalia Molina’s *Fit to Be Citizens*; Leo R. Chavez’s *The Latino Threat*; and Elena R. Gutiérrez’s *Fertile Matters*. 
nature-writer, environmentalist, humanist, and self-proclaimed liberal Delaney Mossbacher—to expose how racism undergirds the “economics not race” logic supporting (im)migrants’ exclusion or inclusion. As I will show, Delaney argues for (im)migrants’ rights and calls out the racist logic utilized by those calling for (im)migrants’ exclusion from the community. However, Boyle indicates this “race neutral” philosophy only exists as theoretical (rather than practical) commitment, as Delaney later qualifies this stance by supporting (im)migrants’ rights only as long as their presence does not negatively affect his lifestyle, thus shifting to a pro-(im)migrant stance rooted in an “economics not race” logic.

At the novel’s onset, Delaney views himself as liberal and a voice of compassion, reason, and inclusiveness. As if to validate Delaney’s progressive commitments, Boyle describes Delaney and Krya as “joggers, nonsmokers, social drinkers…Their memberships included the Sierra Club, Save the Children, the National Wildlife Federation and the Democratic Party” (34).

These ideologies extend to Delaney’s perspective on undocumented (im)migration, particularly his attitude on Mexican (im)migrants in the US. Establishing his support for Mexican (im)migrants, Delaney argues “everyone deserved a chance in life and…the Mexicans would assimilate just like the Poles, Italians, Germans, Irish and Chinese and that besides which we’d stolen California from them in the first place” (102). Delaney believes Mexicans deserve to live in the US (due to historical injustices and a commitment to equal opportunity), but suggests they have been marked by dominant US society as a racialized Other, treated as outsider, and have not been given the chance to assimilate (depicted as a desirable outcome, which again points to US cultural racism). In this instance, Delaney tentatively points to how exclusionary and discriminatory racial attitudes have shaped Mexican (im)migrants experience in the US. However, he forcefully calls out racist exclusionary policies targeting Mexican (im)migrants
during a neighborhood association debate about installing a gate and guard to protect the community. Delaney challenges the plan, noting, “This isn’t about coyotes, don’t kid yourself. It’s about Mexicans, it’s about blacks. It’s about exclusion, division, hate.” (220). At first glance, it appears Boyle is replicating the anti- and pro-(im)migrant debates surrounding Proposition 187, in which the pro-(im)migrant stance was more likely to condemn racist and classist ideologies governing exclusion. However, the novel later shows Delaney departing from treating race as central to the conversations about undocumented (im)migration to focusing primarily on economics.87

During the debate on Proposition 187, many opponents expressed their support of (im)migrants and resistance to 187 through the lens of economics. As I noted in the earlier analysis of news coverage of 187, opponents of the CA ballot measure described (im)migrants as hard-workers and tax-payers who provide fundamental services to the US and its economy. Yet, the anti-187 stance rooted in economic concerns offered support for (im)migrants, while still treating them as economic units. On this point, communications scholars Kent A. Ono and John M. Sloop contend, “Regardless of whether the argument is for or against Proposition 187, public discourses represent immigrants as economic units, significant only insofar as they contribute to the efficient operation of the state’s economy” (28). This stance, even if supportive, dehumanizes (im)migrants, while also conveying an “economics not race logic.” Though, in the case of pro-(im)migrant discourse based upon treating (im)migrants as valuable economic units/contributors, the “economics not race” shifts from the dismissal of race and racism as relevant factors (in the

87 Although Delaney’s pro-(im)migrant stance is ultimately governed by the “economics not race” or “Save our State [of Life] logic, I do not believe Boyle is suggesting all pro-(im)migrant perspectives (including opponents of 187) embrace this approach. There are many examples of people opposing 187 and offering broad support for (im)migrants that derive from anti-racist commitments and do not reduce undocumented (im)migrants to economic units.
anti-(im)migrant stance) to ignoring race and racism almost entirely. And, within the novel, Delaney adopts this stance.

Still committed to his democratic and humanist principles, but increasingly leery of (im)migrants’ presence in his community after the car accident, Delaney supports (im)migrants’ presence in the US for economic reasons. For instance, he argues, “Those people [(im)migrants] had every right to gather on that streetcorner [in search of work]” (185). Yet, he does not challenge the fact that the local labor exchange closes at noon, because although the community “might have been liberal and motivated by a spirit of common humanity and charity…they didn’t want a perpetual encampment of the unemployed, out of luck and foreign in their midst” (58).88 While Delaney still articulates his support for (im)migrants, he primarily assesses their presence and treatment by US citizens through an economic lens, without considering human rights or racial discrimination.

Delaney’s “economics not race” philosophy suggests a concern with the economic implications of (im)migrants’ presence in his community, rather than their racial identity. While expressing an outwardly race-neutral (and, at times even racially inclusive) stance, he is not anti-racist. In fact, his “Save our State [of Life]” position (focused on property values and preserving his hiking grounds) is ultimately a modified version of the anti-(im)migrant discourse of “Save our State.” This “race-neutral,” pro-(im)migrant stance suggests that undocumented (im)migrants, regardless of racial or ethnic identity, are welcome until they disrupt his “way of life.” Once Delaney perceives (im)migrants’ presence in his community as harmful to his way of

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88 Lisa A. Flores and Mary Ann Villarreal argue: “whiteness is more than just race. It is perceived as social fitness, which has, both historically and contemporarily, been linked with assumed intelligence, cleanliness, and hard work” (89). The latter categories reflect how we talk about race—and who is seen as welcome and valuable—in the contemporary US without directly mentioning race.
life, he demands their expulsion. Boyle shows how Delaney’s conditional acceptance of (im)migrants masquerades as inclusive and “race-neutral,” but the novel ultimately underscores that treating (im)migrants as economic units and framing undocumented (im)migration as an economics-only issue dehumanizes (im)migrants, consequently revealing the pernicious racial logic supporting the “economics not race” position.

Highlighting the shared strategies and ideologies linking pro- and anti-(im)migrant “Save our State” logic, Boyle uses Delaney’s “Save our State [of Life]” mentality to expose the cracks in and fallacy of the “economics not race” logic. Delaney eventually concludes the “unemployed, out of luck” foreigners do not belong within the gated communities and must return “to wherever they’d come from, slums, favelas, barrios, whatever they called them. They didn’t belong here, that was for sure” (117). He initially uses the nebulous term “they” to refer to (im)migrants, but eventually directly names Mexican day laborers as a threat to his community and his family’s safety: “‘Mexicans,’ Delaney said, and there was no hesitation anymore, no reluctance to identify people by their ethnicity, no overlay of liberal-humanist guilt. Mexicans, there were Mexicans everywhere” (184). And to drive them out, Krya, Delaney, and their neighbors employ strategies of attrition, described as “the act of weakening or exhausting undocumented (im)migrants’ will to stay in the United States by constant harassment and ‘cutting them off from American jobs and society’” (Capetillo-Ponce 326). These strategies include: reporting “suspicious-looking” people to the police, reducing the local labor exchange hours of operation, and requesting additional patrol of parks and ravines where some (im)migrants reside. An attrition-based approach assumes undocumented people will leave on their own accord (though clearly spurred
by persecution) and settle elsewhere, a clear goal of Proposition 187 and its supporters. Boyle demonstrates how Delaney’s “economics not race” (with race being ignored) mentality mirrors much of the “Save our State” rhetoric espoused by 187, thus exposing how economic exclusiveness obscures racial discrimination.

“Economics Not Race” from the Standpoint of (Im)migrants

The stories of Delaney Mossbacher and Cándido Rincón intersect throughout the novel, beginning with the car accident in which Delaney hits Cándido. The two men do not meet again until the end of the novel; however, writing a parallel narrative to Delaney’s, Boyle explores how economics and race shape Cándido and América’s experiences in the US. In contrast to the US citizens who express their support for or resistance to undocumented (im)migrants through the lens of economics, América (and to a lesser degree Cándido) actually recognizes the relationship between race and economics in US (im)migration discourse and dominant treatments/perceptions of (im)migrants. I show how Boyle uses Cándido and América’s experiences with racism and classism to demonstrate the pervasiveness of these ideologies among US citizens, thus minimizing the possibility readers will see Delaney or his neighbors as outliers or poor representatives of the “economics not race” standpoint.

Early in the novel, Boyle’s depiction of Cándido and América as undocumented (im)migrants seeking jobs in the US matches the flattened depictions of (im)migrants offered by 187 and its supporters which emphasize economic motivations for (im)migration and measure

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89 In the novel, elsewhere means the slums and shantytowns far removed from the gated communities, high priced homes, luxury cars, and manicured lawns Delaney and his community enjoy Commenting on the realities and consequences of class-based divisions, sociologist Gloria González-López has argued: “the everyday life experiences of immigrant women living in an urban context often expose them to socioeconomic segregation, demanding work schedules, lack of transportation, unsafe neighborhoods, and unprotected work areas—all of which combine to create dangerous social spaces” (240). Delaney and company can only contemplate how (im)migrants undermine their safety and security as they erect more divides; they have no regard for the safety and security of (im)migrants living and working in the community.
the economic worth of (im)migrants. For example, Cándido and América enter the US without documentation in order to find work and act as consumers in the global marketplace. América competes with a white, working-class woman for a day-job, embodying popular fears that (im)migrants steal jobs from US citizens. Further, Cándido reflects on (im)migration from his town, noting, “For three quarters of the year the villages of Morelos became villages of women, all but deserted by the men who had migrated North to earn real money and work eight and ten and twelve hours a day” (50). The novel depicts Cándido as part of an influx of Mexicans arriving in the US, reflecting the fear of mass (im)migration and long-term settlement alleged by 187. Yet, while Cándido and América’s (im)migration to the US embodies many of the economic fears and stereotypes surrounding undocumented (im)migration, and thus gives more firepower to calls for economic-based exclusion, they ultimately recognize that both classism and racism inform their experience in the US. Cándido and América’s naming and recognition of how racism factors into their (im)migration experience and lives in the US invalidates popular claims that resistance to undocumented (im)migrants’ presence in the US is race-neutral.

Throughout the novel, America and Cándido encounter increasingly malignant examples of class- and race-based discrimination in the US. América’s search for employment seemingly confirms the neighborhood association’s charges that undocumented (im)migrants compete with US citizens for jobs. When approached by a white, English-speaking woman at the labor exchange, América wonders, “Was this woman trying to tell her that she, a gringa in her own country, was looking for the same work as América? It couldn’t be. It was a fantasy. Crazy” (57). Competing with a white, US American for a job causes América to feel distress over the distribution of labor opportunities in the US. She fears a white, English-speaking, US American woman will be seen by US employers as a more desirable worker and that they will pass on
hiring América as a day laborer or underpay her, thus privileging whiteness and treating it as an indicator of US citizenship. While Cándido wants to support his wife, he also believes that living and working in the US will afford him the opportunity to take advantage of the nation’s riches. His idealization of the US dissipates after local teenagers chase him from the ravine he has made a temporary home, yell “ Fucking Beaners. Rip it up, man. Destroy it” (62), and write the message “BEANERS DIE” (62). As he relocates their items to a safer hideaway, Cándido reflects upon the racist attack and the pervasiveness of anti-(im)migrant ideologies in US society: “Those boys—those teenage gabachos—had terrified him. They weren’t La Migra, no, and they weren’t the police, but the way they’d attacked his harmless little bundle of things had real teeth in it, real venom” (84). The racially-motivated attack demonstrates that racist anti-(im)migrant sentiment not only appears in political discourse (such as 187) but can guide actions as well (also apparent via Foster’s rampage in Falling Down). Boyle demonstrates that the political and theoretical debates behind 187 can have tangible and lasting implications.90

In the wake of repeated economic discrimination and race-based violence, Cándido and América become disillusioned with the US. The couple begins internalizing many of the classist narratives constructing (im)migrants’ presence in the US as an economic liability to the nation and to (im)migrants themselves. Cándido recognizes others judge him as threatening because of his appearance, including the color of his skin and the tattered clothing he wears, and he angrily reflects upon how most people “look at you like you were dirt, like you were going to steal, like you couldn’t keep your hands off all the shiny bright packages” (17). The ridiculing and stereotyping Cándido encounters is evidence of cultural racism, as he is made to believe he does

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90 On this point, John M. Sloop and Kent A. Ono argue 187 rhetoric about undocumented (im)migrants “may have long-term political effects across generations of people” (6).
not belong based upon his appearance. Cándido does not embody US “national affect” or a “civic identity…that connotes American-ness, which includes the English language, public displays of nationalism, and certain markers of socioeconomic class and race” (Cisneros 133); as a result, he is harassed and treated as a menace. In the wake of these rejections, Cándido and América begin to doubt their self-worth and ability to survive in the US. For example, América knows she is viewed as a source of cheap labor, and fears she is being ripped off because she cannot speak English and does not have the ability to protest or file grievances against her boss-of-the-day. Comparing her earnings to those of her white co-worker, América considers the possibility “Mary was getting thirty or thirty-five, plus the extra two hours, because she was white, because she spoke English” (96). She recognizes the potential wage discrimination based upon language-skills, legal status, and possibly racial identity, but also accepts she has little recourse if she wants to continue working. Believing her ability to remain in the US is contingent upon working and saving money, América accepts this exploited position. Treated by employers as expendable, undocumented (im)migrants cycle through a revolving door of low-wage employment options.

Minimal pay and sporadic work opportunities force many undocumented (im)migrants to routinely search for and secure new jobs. This cycle confirms 187-based fears of economic theft or competition. Yet, as I have argued, framing (im)migrants as economic competition and drain on US social services minimizes the role of race and racism in (im)migration discourse. My analysis of The Tortilla Curtain demonstrated how economic and racial discrimination work in tandem in order to show the fraudulence of “economics not race” claims embedded in dominant US (im)migration discourse and to expose how race infiltrates US (im)migration discourse.

**Conclusion**

The “economics not race” rhetoric embedded in Proposition 187 flourishes in 1990s-era
US (im)migration discourse, whether taken up as justification for closed- or open-border policies. Identifying undocumented (im)migration as an economic concern places a direct focus on (im)migrants’ economic worth(lessness). This framework treats (im)migrants as “economic units,” which dehumanizes people, perpetuates the divisive logic separating “draining” foreigners from contributing US citizens, and obscures evidence of cultural racism.

As I have demonstrated in my analysis of *Falling Down*, *The Tortilla Curtain*, and Proposition 187, the discourse framing (im)migrants as either contributing to or detracting from the economic prosperity of the US nation-state draws upon racial scripts classifying (im)migrants as inferior, threatening, or as outsiders. My analysis of *Falling Down* showed how the film depicts white, middle-class, US American men as victims of an economic downturn caused by “foreigners” or cultural outsiders. The main character reacts to these injustices by violently attacking foreigners (primarily men of color). Yet, the narrative resists characterizing him as racist or condemning his attacks as racially motivated. Instead, the film presents his grievances as defensible, thus justifying the “economics not race” logic propelling the film. Conversely, *The Tortilla Curtain* challenges the validity of the “economics not race” argument. I argued that pro- and anti-(im)migrant discourses justifying (im)migrants’ exclusion as a matter of economics actually rely upon racial scripts designating (im)migrants as cultural outsiders who do not look or act like community insiders.

The “economics not race” logic not only denies the role of race in (im)migration discourse but depicts (im)migrants as responsible for a struggling US economy and resulting

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91 Describing and contrasting how economic concerns manifest in anti- and pro-(im)migration discourse, Mae M. Ngai notes, “Nativism is fueled by concerns over racial difference, economic competition, and terrorism; support for immigrant inclusion is generated by the growing participation of immigrants in the economic and social life of the country, as well as by the political mobilization of immigrant-ethnic groups themselves” (*Major Problems* 566).
social ills. And, as Catherine R. Squires argues, the refusal to acknowledge or critique systemic racism, “relocates the responsibility and causality of political and economic inequality in the bodies—in the skin—of individuals rather than in the institutional and cultural practices that define and support the racial hierarchy in the first place” (102). Dominant US legal and popular rhetoric fixated on the economic implications of (im)migrants in the US fails to interrogate the institutional and cultural practices that define and support economically-motivated racial hierarchies.
CHAPTER 3: RACIALIZED EXCLUSIONARY NATIONALISM AND THE SECURE FENCE ACT OF 2006

When creators of (im)migration-themed US political and cultural texts elide or outright deny the racialization of (im)migrant populations within US border defense discourse, they often supply an alternative explanation for (im)migrants’ exclusion from the US nation-state. In previous chapters, I have examined the use of gendered and economic discourses in obscuring racial logics. Nationalism is another justification for (im)migrants’ exclusion or expulsion from the US.\(^{92}\) The denial of race-based exclusion is not new, but has gained traction in political and popular discourse following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. In the years after the attacks, the US Congress passed a wide range of laws designed to heighten US security and prevent terrorism, including, but not limited to, The Patriot Act (2001), Aviation and Transportation Security Act (2001), Homeland Security Act of 2002, and the Secure Fence Act of 2006. Nationalist ideologies rooted in American exceptionalism and the government’s responsibility to protect and secure the nation-state outwardly govern these legislative actions, reflecting (im)migration scholar Eithne Luibhéid’s assessment that US (im)migration policies continually reinscribe “exclusionary forms of dominant nationalism” (103). Additionally, US racial logic also infiltrates these post-9/11 “security” laws, producing a racialized exclusionary nationalism. Commenting on the intersections of race and nation, legal scholar Daniel Kanstroom contends, “as the history of deportation shows so clearly, we simply cannot easily disaggregate nationality discrimination from its racial and ethnic aspects” (246). Extending these

\(^{92}\) Philosopher Nenad Miscevic describes nationalism as “(1) the attitude that the members of a nation have when they care about their national identity, and (2) the actions that the members of a nation take when seeking to achieve (or sustain) self-determination.” I use this two-fold definition in evaluating manifestations of nationalism in the featured legal and cultural texts.
legal-based assessments to the realm of culture, this chapter evaluates both the institutional and cultural investment in using nation- and security-based language to deny the existence of race-based exclusion. Demonstrating this claim, I evaluate how The Secure Fence Act of 2006 and the (im)migrant-themed photographic archive, The Border Film Project, participate in a racialization project that minimizes the role of race, racial identity, and racism in border defense policies and discourse.93

The Secure Fence Act, Race, and Nation

The increased number of Mexicans residing long-term in the US, plus broader political and popular support for scientific ideas about race and racial purity, contributed to US federal involvement at the US-Mexico border during the first quarter of the twentieth century.94 And, throughout the twentieth century, politicians took up the question of Mexicans’ relationship to and presence within the US. Some of the responses included exempting Mexicans from the numerical quotas of the Immigration Act of 1924 (the Johnson-Reed Act) and later applying restrictive quotas through the Immigration Act of 1965 (the Hart-Cellar Act). Even though 1920s (im)migration laws exempted Mexico from numerical quotas, historian Mae M. Ngai argues, “the enforcement provisions of restriction—notably visa requirements and border-control policies—profoundly affected Mexicans, making them the single largest group of illegal aliens...
by the late 1920s.” (Impossible 7). Designating Mexicans as “illegal aliens,” and noting that Mexicans suddenly comprised a large percentage of this category following Johnson-Reed, “the actual and imagined association of Mexicans with illegal immigration” took hold culturally and politically and gave rise to “an emergent Mexican ‘race problem’” (Ngai, Impossible 7).

Drawing national borders, classifying bodies as legal or illegal, and monitoring (im)migrants’ movement across the US-Mexico border all point to the uneasiness about border security, who enters the nation, and the threat of “illegal” (im)migrants. Such uneasiness aided the passage of the Labor Appropriation Act of 1924, through which the US Congress established the Border Patrol. This action extended federal resources and authority to “border inspectors” charged with enforcing “the laws regulating immigration of aliens into the United States” (“Preventing”). At the agency’s inception, border management focused on minimizing the number of foreign nationals entering “without inspection” (“Preventing”). Early on, most agents patrolled the border on horseback and (im)migrants passing through official checkpoints were forced to undergo inspection for documentation and diseases, because lacking the former or possessing the latter could place US citizens at risk. While twenty-first-century US political and popular discourses still frame (im)migrants crossing the US-border as a threat to the nation-state, agents now receive considerable technological assistance in policing the border and safeguarding the nation-state.

US politicians’ sustained emphasis on security in the decade following 9/11, as evidenced by laws such as the Patriot Act and the Secure Fence Act of 2006 (SFA), made the nation-state’s welfare and security a matter of public concern. Upon signing the SFA, President George W. Bush reported the bill “will help protect the American people…make our borders more secure” and serve as “an important step toward immigration reform” (“Fact Sheet”). Bush’s description
suggests the SFA operates as a nationalist project, an anti-terrorist measure intent on securing and protecting the US nation-state. However, the wording in this brief statement indicates the “American people” require protection from an unnamed threat exploiting gaps in the nation’s border security. As I will show, this security-based nationalist legislation relies upon racial scripts marking foreigners as outsiders, threatening, and unwelcome in the US.

My analysis focuses on sections two and three of the SFA, which call for operational control over the border through security improvements. Specifically, section two defines operational control as “the prevention of all unlawful entries into the United States, including entries by terrorists, other unlawful aliens, instruments of terrorism, narcotics, and other contraband.” And, section three calls for the “construction of fencing and security improvements in [the] border area from [the] Pacific Ocean to [the] Gulf of Mexico.”95 Security improvements include more vehicle barriers, checkpoints, and lighting to decrease unauthorized entry as well as cameras, sensors, satellites, and unmanned aerial vehicles “to reinforce our infrastructure at the border” (“Fact Sheet”).96 Pairing these sections reveals how the SFA places terrorists and “unlawful aliens” in the same category, indicating security improvements, including additional border fencing, are necessary to keep these supposedly interchangeable threats out and the US nation-state safe.

The relationship between the War on Terror and national security at the US-Mexico border undergirds the designation of non-white foreigners as threats to the US nation-state. Commenting on this relationship, sociologist Jennifer Correa argues, “The War on Terror

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95 The Secure Fence Act of 2006 “originally mandated 850 miles of border fencing. But this act was soon suspended by the 2007 Consolidated Appropriations Act, which required DHS to build no less than seven hundred miles of border Fence” (Maril 56).
96 In order to fund the border fence and additional security, President Bush signed a spending bill earmarking 1.2 billion dollar (Maril 140). Yet, the high price tag only covered the building of 700 miles of fencing across the 2,000 mile international border.
propelled the passage of the Secure Fence Act (SFA) of 2006,” with the construction of additional border fencing intended “to curtail unauthorized immigration and international terrorism” (99-100). Critiquing the political actions linking terrorism and the US-Mexico border, filmmaker Rory Kennedy notes that of the 29 terrorist attacks carried out against the US by non-citizens in last quarter century, not one perpetrator has entered the US via the US-Mexico border (The Fence). Yet, the US treats certain national outsiders as a threat, namely persons originating from Mexico or Latin American nations and Middle Easterners, Arabs, and Muslims. Although the nature of the threat varies, treating national outsiders as interchangeable conflates potential terrorists with economic (im)migrants. Through the SFA’s alignment of terrorists and unlawful aliens, and other “bad guys,” potential threats against the US nation-state may take the form of terrorism, economic depression, or the mass influx of outsiders who could change or challenge the political and cultural (and racial) status quo. As sociologist Robert Lee Maril reminds us, “immigration policies can embody excuses and justifications for systematic racism and acts of violence. Nowhere is this more evident than in the bloody and violent history of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands” (281).

From Law to Cultural Texts

This chapter pairs the Secure Fence Act of 2006 with the Border Film Project, a collection of photographs taken by Minutemen and migrants.97 Addressing the relationship and influences of legal and cultural discourse, literary scholar Lisa Lowe indicates, “Although the law is perhaps the discourse that most literally governs,” US national culture plays an instrumental role in shaping the national project and citizens’ allegiance to it (2). Commenting specifically on “printed and visual media coverage and representation of issues surrounding

97 BFP uses the term “migrant.” I will generally use the blended term when discussing the archive.
Mexican immigration,” scholars David R. Maciel and María Rosa García-Acevedo argue these cultural texts “have been greatly responsible for the current rise in xenophobia and anti-immigrant sentiment in the United States” (149). I consider how the Border Film Project (BFP), like the Secure Fence Act, offers a seemingly race-neutral presentation of US nationalism. A race-neutral approach is troubling because it shifts attention away from the role of race and racism in US (im)migration discourse and justifies (im)migrants’ exclusion from the US on the basis of upholding the law and protecting the nation-state’s principles. Further, the nationalism advanced by the legal and cultural texts normalizes whiteness or white, US Americans’ points of view; thus, describing this stand of nationalism as race-neutral works to further centralize and normalize whiteness in the US.

The Border Film Project (BFP) reveals the varied uses of nationalism and patriotism within border defense rhetoric, particularly as conveyed by the photography of Minutemen volunteers and undocumented (im)migrants. I evaluate how the Minutemen contributors utilize nation-based ideologies, obscure evidence of race-based exclusion in border defense discourse, and extend the nation-state’s color-blind racial project. As discussed earlier, sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva describes the minimization of race in contemporary US America, even amidst clear evidence of racism, as colorblind racism. Bonilla-Silva defines colorblind racism as a racial ideology used to explain “contemporary racial inequality as the outcome of nonracial dynamics” (2). Colorblind racism surfaces in a variety of political and cultural sites, including the Border Film Project’s vision of nationalism, as shaped by the Minutemen. Their brand of nationalism depends upon constructions of US citizens as white, foreigners as brown, and US border protectors (Minutemen) as patriotic, authoritative, and dominant. However, as I will show, race and racial “legitimacy” (coded as white) are downplayed in the photography through a reliance
on nationalist ideologies, used to highlight the ostensibly inspiring and patriotic work of border defense activists. As a result, protective or exclusionary border defense efforts are misrepresented as purely patriotic and positive. Exclusionary nationalist rhetoric couched in security concerns emphasizes (im)migrants’ nationality, foreignness, and status as law-breakers as the cause for their exclusion from the US nation-state.

The photos submitted by (im)migrants also reveal efforts to insert themselves into the US national imaginary as recognizable members. Describing the concept of a national imaginary, scholar Benedict Anderson argues, “regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail…the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (7). Yet, while (im)migrants subscribe to and embrace US nationalist thinking as an assimilationist tactic, they also express countercultural messages about race. As I will show, the photos present “counterscripts” that challenge the Minutemen’s depictions of (im)migrants as threatening outsiders. Historian Natalia Molina defines counterscripts as messages set forth by racialized groups that “offer alternatives or directly challenge dominant racial scripts” (How Race 7).

Further, she emphasizes that counterscripts are not just high-profile protests but can take place “in daily expressions of compassion and solidarity” (10). Many of the images feature (im)migrants showing their faces and smiling for the camera, walking in daylight, and sitting in US public places, thus undermining and rewriting dominant US racial scripts marking (im)migrants as sneaky and suspicious shadow people.98

**Border Film Project: Nationalism through Legitimacy, Authority, and Dominance**

The Border Film Project (BFP) is a collaborative digital photographic collection featuring

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98 Following the passage of IRCA, President Reagan called the law “generous” and stated it would draw the undocumented population out of “the shadows” and help them “step into the sunlight” (“Statement”).
images of the US-Mexico border shot by undocumented (im)migrants and Minutemen volunteers.\textsuperscript{99} Conceived in 2005, BFP intends to “shed light on the issue of illegal immigration” and offers “a way to document the border through the eyes of the men and women on the line” (“Project Background”). In order to achieve the stated goals, the project creators distributed disposable cameras and stamped return envelopes to undocumented (im)migrants via Mexican (im)migrant shelters and to Minutemen operating at border watch sites in Arizona, California, New Mexico, and Texas. Along with the camera, each participant received a notecard instructing them to photograph the people and places not readily shown by media, especially pictures of “day-to-day life” at the border (“Camera Packages”).\textsuperscript{100} The BFP Web site fashions the project as a neutral platform presenting a balanced representation of “the issue of illegal immigration” from differing vantage points providing the public with access to the border from the standpoint of those “on the line,” specifically Minutemen volunteers and undocumented (im)migrants.\textsuperscript{101} Providing both Minutemen and (im)migrants cameras supports the BFP’s stated commitment and desire to present a balanced look at the border and ostensibly distances the creators from a specific political stance. The archives’ stated intentions, however, differ considerably from the messages produced by Minutemen volunteers’ photos and the content and structure of the BFP Web site. I will begin with an analysis of the site structure and organization before turning to the Minutemen photography and concluding with (im)migrants’ photographic images, evaluating

\textsuperscript{99} My viewing of the photos takes place online at the BFP Web site. The photos also appeared a part of travelling exhibit available to the public between July 2006 and January 2007. The installation ran once in each of the four US border states as well as Nebraska. Additionally, the BFP creators published a book, \textit{Border Film Project}, through Harry N. Abrams in 2007, which is available for purchase (Amazon.com listed the book for $18.83 on May 18, 2015).

\textsuperscript{100} Notecards distributed to Minutemen were written in English; those distributed to (im)migrants were written in Spanish.

\textsuperscript{101} This framework eclipses other social actors who live or work on the line including Border Patrol agents and local residents. However, it also offers a nuanced examination of the border from the perspective of individuals, as select (im)migrants and Minutemen contribute photographic images of their experience at or near the US-Mexico border.
how all three groups employ nationalist ideologies in calling for the exclusion or inclusion of
(im)migrants in the US national imaginary.

An evaluation of the project’s site structure and Minutemen photography demonstrates
how xenophobia and racial exclusion undergird ideas about US citizenship, patriotism,
legitimacy, and authority. Interrogating these parts independently of (im)migrants’ photography
demonstrates how the project’s creators (perhaps unintentionally) normalize the Minutemen’s
depiction of the border, which both upholds and legitimizes white privilege and authority while
denouncing the seemingly open borders that allow for the influx of Mexican and Latino
(im)migrants.

_BFP Site: Exclusionary Nationalism and Claims of Neutrality_

Through a collection of photographic images, the Border Film Project “show[s] the
human face of immigration” from the perspective of the Minutemen and (im)migrants. The
pictures “challenge us to question our stereotypes” about “illegal immigration,” according to
project creators Brett Huneycutt, Victoria Criado, and Rudy Adler (“Project Background”).

Other than offering a brief biography of the creators’ academic and professional backgrounds—
which range from a Fulbright scholar studying migration in El Salvador (Huneycutt) to a Wall
Street associate focused on emerging markets in Latin America (Criado) to an artist and writer
(Adler)—and an explanation of their role in camera distribution and image collection, the BFP
places the spotlight on the photographers and photos. Yet, the intention motivating the creation
of the project ultimately clashes with the public presentation of the images on the BFP website.
While the BFP creators position themselves as neutral facilitators, they ultimately influence

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102 Huneycutt, Criado, and Adler refer to themselves as a collective “we” throughout the site. I use the terms project
organizers or project creators when referencing the trio.
viewers’ perspective on the border and border control measures based upon how they organize and introduce the photographs on the website.

The site’s photos section features images from (im)migrants separated from those taken by Minutemen. Before even examining the photos, the two groups are divided by national origin into distinct and separate categories. Viewers see a Mexican passport and a US passport. When hovering over the images, the Mexican passport reads “Migrants,” while the US passport reads “Minutemen.”¹⁰³ These labels reflect the photographers’ group associations, but the use of a Mexican passport and the label “migrants” to identify the group also normalizes the prevailing construction of Mexicans as undocumented (im)migrants (or foreigners) and undocumented (im)migrants as Mexicans. Of course, not all people entering the US without documentation originate from Mexico (photographers identified themselves as Mexican, Honduran, or Guatemalan), and not all Mexicans or people of Mexican descent living in the US are (im)migrants. Yet, as Amitava Kumar observes in his study on passports, “The passport chooses to tell its story about you” (ix), explaining pre-conceived notions about names, nationality, sex, and other identifying factors featured on a passport influence how we characterize the passport holder. The site’s organization reveals the creators’ pre-conceived divisions and differences between (im)migrants and Minutemen, Mexicans and US Americans, with only the Minutemen’s presence in the US marked as legitimate through federal documentation. Divisions emphasizing national origin and citizenship call upon nationalistic sentiments and set the stage for racist and xenophobic descriptions about each group’s presence on the northern side of the US-Mexico

¹⁰³ While citizens may be entitled to a passport, this form of documentation is issued for the purpose of exiting (and likely reentering) one’s country of origin during authorized international travel. Some Mexican (im)migrants may possess a Mexican passport, though the likelihood of carrying it into the US when crossing outside of official checkpoints is slim, as the document serves as an identification of one’s foreignness and offers an official name, age, location for US enforcement officials to track detained (im)migrants.
Further complicating the project’s claims to neutrality, the Web site’s divisive organization also extends toward descriptions of Minutemen’s presence at the border. The project creators adopt the Minutemen’s language and perspectives when presenting the group’s photography. The creators indicate they distributed cameras to Minutemen at “observation sites” in all four border states (i.e. Arizona, California, New Mexico, and Texas). The term “observation” implies a non-threatening, watchful intentionality. This aligns with the Minutemen’s stated philosophy to watch, report, and disengage. Yet, the Minutemen do more than just observe the border; they actively deter (im)migrants, call for border patrol, and seek to have (im)migrants deported from the country. For example, a series of photographs taken by a Minutemen volunteer named Rick reveals the “observer’s” role in spotting, reporting, and increasing the likelihood of (im)migrants’ arrest by US officials. Rick labels his series of photos (discussed in greater detail below) with this explanation: “Reported migrant on highway to Border Patrol and photographed the encounter.” The series ends with the (im)migrant’s arrest, revealing the consequences of Rick’s “observation” and the “success” of his mission.

By using the Minutemen’s preferred terminology concerning their presence at the border, BFP creators validate the group’s effort to frame their work as patriotic and a nationalist presence rather than a racist and xenophobic drive for exclusion. In the camera package

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104 The project creators’ visited US border observation sites in order to recruit Minutemen participants. Volunteers returned 35 cameras with 27 exposures each, producing a maximum of 945 images, though the site only features 18 images attributed to Minutemen volunteers. The 18 images come from 10 distinct cameras; the number of photographers remains unknown. The images featured were developed from cameras originally distributed in Arizona (6); California (9), and New Mexico (3). Few photographers identify themselves by name, age, or place of origin, those offering personal details hail from the border states of Arizona, California, and New Mexico, along with interior states including Pennsylvania, Wyoming, and Nevada. Twelve of the photos feature Minutemen volunteers. The overwhelming majority of the volunteers are white men, though a white woman appears in one photo of a large group (which is also shot by a female volunteer). The Minutemen identified through this project, whether as subjects or photographers, range in age from about 40 to early 70s.
distributed to Minutemen, an instructional notecard warns against “endangering the mission” by using flash at night (figure 9, below). Before photographers took a single photo, the creators’ were already using and reproducing the Minutemen’s language and signaling the importance of the “mission.” The creators also validate the group’s self-proclaimed activist work by describing Minutemen volunteers as “by and large concerned Americans, trying to do their part to make the United States a safer place and to protect American jobs” (“Minutemen Photos”). This congratulatory sentiment ultimately constructs Minutemen as true patriots seeking to defend their nation from dangerous outsiders who threaten “real” Americans’ job prospects. The site also notes, “Many [Minutemen] are retired veterans or have backgrounds in law enforcement. They have continued their lives of public service by volunteering to do what they believe the U.S. government should be doing—regaining control” of the southern border (“Minutemen Photos”).

This narrative portrays the groups’ work and presence at the border as public service and patriotic, rather than vigilantism and unauthorized militaristic presence. Further, messages concerning the racialized nature of belonging and citizenship are embedded in depictions of Minutemen safeguarding the nation, citizens, and US jobs from foreigners. Connecting US identity to “themes of patriotism, masculinity, militarism, and multiculturalism,” allows the Minutemen to “subtly [mask] the white supremacist values undergirding [their] stated purpose” (Holling, “Patrolling” 99). In their efforts to understand the border “through the eyes of the men and women on the line,” BFP creators corroborate depictions of Minutemen as (white) patriotic defenders of the nation (see figure 1) attempting to regain control of the border and the country from the tide of brown-skinned Others entering and staying without authorization.
As I have demonstrated the site’s presentation of Minutemen photography largely adopts the group’s sense of self, purpose, and language. Conversely, in the introduction to the (im)migrants’ photos, the creators explain how they recruited participants and taught (im)migrants to take photos, use a flash, and spot a US mailbox. The passage ends with this sentiment: “Most migrants seemed eager to participate. Many expressed a profound desire to show American citizens what they had to endure to arrive in the United States” (“Migrant Photos”). The site invites “American citizens” to sympathize with (im)migrants, while still seeing the (im)migrants as outsiders. Further, (im)migrants’ perspectives on (im)migration and the border region only appear through the featured photos; the BFP creators’ framework offers no direct commentary from (im)migrants on their reasons for crossing without documentation or intentions upon entering the US. This is an especially conscious choice, as the BFP encourages viewers to read the Minutemen photography through the lens of their members: as patriotism and service to the nation. Although presenting the BFP as a neutral platform, the site’s organization and introductory content echoes the logic of racialized exclusionary nationalism as advanced by the Minutemen, which I discuss in the next section. The imbalance in representations of the border shows the BFP privileging dominant exclusionary US nationalism.
Minutemen Photography, Nationalist Imagery

The Minutemen embrace and enact a racialized exclusionary nationalism, which constructs undocumented (im)migrants as foreigners, outsiders, and undesirable in the US. This brand of nationalism infiltrates their photographic contributions to the BFP. Yet, through the captured images and occasional commentary, the Minutemen depict their expressions of nationalism as patriotic and rooted in US national security and dominance, thus shifting focus away from the role of race in securing the border and (im)migrants’ exclusion. As I will demonstrate, nationalism manifests within the photography in three interlocking ways. First, displays of nationalism and volunteers’ identification with the US appear through images of the US flag. The photos capture volunteers waving, wearing, or planting the flag as a signal that they stand on US American land, thus granting volunteers the legal right and social legitimacy to patrol the US border region. Second, by featuring border defense activities such as “observing” and reporting, the photographs convey the volunteers’ authoritative presence at the border and effectiveness in protecting and securing the nation-state. Finally, the photos emphasize a sense of national superiority and the Minutemen’s dominance by focusing on weaponry, technology, and the treatment of the border as a war zone that US patriots successfully monitor and regulate (deemed increasingly necessary for national security in post-9/11 US). Tellingly, few of these photos feature (im)migrants; instead, the Minutemen treat (im)migrants as threats looming off-camera. The near-absence of (im)migrants from Minutemen photos also reinforces the perception of (im)migrants as shadow people who are (or should be) hidden from US public view, which denies (im)migrants’ agency and visibility. All three intersecting and complimentary visions of nationalism accept whiteness as central to the nation, the defense of the border, and expressions of patriotism.
Establishing Legitimacy through Patriotism

The Minutemen’s photographic archive demonstrates their understanding of the border as a distinctly US space through the display of US American flags. The flag’s presence in photos functions in several official and legitimizing ways. Whether planting the flag in the ground or hanging it on a building, its presence establishes the land, building, or space as the realm of the US and makes their unofficial work and presence seem officially sanctioned. Figure 2 (below) taken by Tim, age 39, from Twin Peaks, CA exemplifies Minutemen’s use of the flag at their border outpost locations. Tim is sitting in the front seat of a vehicle and captures a Minutemen camp through the vehicle’s window. The camp includes two male volunteers, one of whom is saluting the photographer, standing beneath a canopy tent, flanked by vehicles on either side as well as two US flags. By planting the flags in the ground, the men assert their right to be on the land and establish the space as belonging to the US. Nationalistic claims on the land tag it as US territory, legitimate Minutemen’s presence, and differentiate US citizens from those without claims to residency or citizenship, particularly the (im)migrants they seek to exclude.

Figure 2: Camera 51, Image 15 by Tim

By waving, hanging, and flying the flag, volunteers are also coded as good, patriotic US Americans, as opposed to overzealous, racist, and xenophobic vigilantes. They rely upon their
national identity and claims to US citizenship to establish authority and legitimize their presence at the border, regardless of whether they call the border region home. The photographic contributions establish Minutemen as national insiders protecting the border region and by extension the nation as a whole.\footnote{The Minutemen do not lack opportunities to share their messages with the US public, as members appear in documentaries such as \textit{Border} (2008) and \textit{Wetback} (2007). While some documentarians (such as the director of \textit{Border}) may be friendly to the Minutemen agenda, the production team ultimately edits interviews to fit the documentary’s message. In turn, as photographers, the Minutemen can frame and shoot the border as they choose. Although BFP selects which photos appear on the site and viewers may impose unintended interpretations, the photographic archive gives Minutemen some control over articulating their relationship to the border.} For example, one of photos comes from a camera distributed in New Mexico; the photographer is identified as Wayne, age 55, from Corry, PA. Clearly the (im)migrants are not the only people far from home, as volunteers also traveled from long distances to “observe” the border. Yet, placed within the Minutemen category, the photo defines a man from Pennsylvania, who traveled nearly 2,000 miles to the border region, as belonging to and authorized to move through the US border region due to his national identity.\footnote{Laws such as the Patriot Act (2001); Aviation and Transportation Security Act (2001); Enhanced Border Security and Visa Entry Reform Act of 2001; Homeland Security Act of 2002; REAL ID Act of 2005; and the Secure Fence Act of 2006 aid in spreading the culture of fear rooted in security concerns beyond border or port cities by “expand[ing] the definition of the border and border security to include more and more of the interior United States” (Cisneros 135) as well as inhabitants of those interior states (e.g. Wayne from Corry, PA who submitted photos). The laws also give new momentum to anti-(im)migrant groups and use of security-focused national rhetoric.} Further, by establishing US citizenship and patriotism as the dividing line between insider and outsider, the photos subtly mark (im)migrants as foreign, out of place, and unwelcome in the border space and outside the US national imaginary.

The Minutemen feature the flag in their photos as a means of legitimizing their activities. The flag partially shields the Minutemen from labels such as vigilante, as it roots their extralegal border policing in the ideology of patriotic nationalism. As Michelle A. Holling notes, “to critique the MMP metonymically serves as a critique of the whole history of patriotism and even of being an ‘American’” (“Patrolling” 103). The flag serves as a buffer from critique, not only
legitimizing the Minutemen’s presence in the geographic space of the border but also their extralegal mission as a desire to protect and secure the nation. Thus, although US racial logic deeply shapes (im)migrants experiences and treatment within the United States, the Minutemen alter the discourse by placing a spotlight on national identity. Racism is thus “laundered” or cleaned up by redirecting (im)migration conversation to a unified expression of patriotism and nationalism, couched in assertions of US citizens legality and commitment to protecting and defending the nation-state. The Minutemen name law abidance as the basis for US nationalist ideology, which is ironic noting the extrajudicial nature of their actions. Nonetheless, the construction of (im)migrants as law-breakers suggests their exclusion from the nation results from an unwillingness to follow and embrace US national laws. Further, US citizens must commit to upholding these laws in order to convey their own loyalty to the country and ensure the nation-state’s security.

Authoritative Nationalism

The Minutemen’s images capture border defense activities such as observing and reporting undocumented (im)migrants in order to assert the volunteers’ authoritativeness at the border. The Minutemen operate as unofficial US authorities and seek to establish individual and national dominance over foreign (im)migrant populations. The series of photos analyzed below reveal how the Minutemen documenting and proving their legitimacy and authority in the US border region can result in (im)migrants’ arrest and deportation. This is significant, because deportation is more than just border control, “it implicates the concept of belonging, cleansing, and scapegoating…It facilitates tighter bonds of solidarity among others who share anger and indignation…It renders the offender not simply a foreigner, but an expelled, banished, criminal foreigner—as complete an outcast as one can imagine” (Kanstroom 19-20). Minutemen
volunteers use their self-assigned authority to further expand the divisions between US insiders and Mexican or foreign outsiders and reinforce popular conceptions of (im)migrants as criminal foreigners, a label that aligns with racial scripts casting brown-skinned (im)migrants as law-breakers and their presence in the US as objectionable and potentially threatening.

A series of photos documenting the arrest of a male (im)migrant highlights expressions of authoritative nationalism. In the photos, authoritative nationalism is shaped by a sense of belonging and power derived from national identity. Additionally, the series reveals how Minutemen base their understanding of legality and authority on skin color, dress, and demeanor. Rick (age and place of origin unknown) tags his photos with the message: “Reported migrant on highway to Border Patrol and photographed the encounter.” After spotting the man walking down the highway and reporting him, Rick eventually witnessed the (im)migrants’ arrest by a US Border Patrol agent (see figure 6 below). However, up until the point of apprehension, he could not be sure the photos’ subject was an undocumented (im)migrant. While the man walked alone on an isolated highway, Rick also wandered that highway. Yet, Rick reads a brown-skinned man as an (im)migrant and unauthorized, rather than as a citizen or as “legal.” In figure 3 (below), the subject appears in the distance. The distance between the men is so great that it would be easy to miss the human subject entirely if not labeled. Nonetheless, Rick chooses to photograph what may be his initial “spotting” of the man presumed to be an undocumented (im)migrant. Moving closer to the presumed (im)migrant, Rick takes another photo (figure 4, below), though viewers can only see the subject’s back. The man hides his face from the camera and looks down at the ground, likely an indication he does not want his photo taken. However, Rick takes the photo and asserts his dominance and authority in this encounter. His sense of authority is backed by the belief he belongs in the area and, as a citizen, has the right and
authority to evaluate the legitimacy of others’ presence. Shooting figure 5 (below) from a distance, Rick captures the subject speaking to a Border Patrol agent. The note attached to the photograph offers few specific details, including whether Rick spoke to the agent, if the agent asked for proof of Rick’s citizenship, or if his US citizenship was presumed based upon factors such as skin color, dress, language, or his authoritative presence on the US borderlands highway.

Figure 3: Camera 81, Image 14 by Rick
Figure 4: Camera 81, Image 15 by Rick
Figure 5: Camera 81, Image 17 by Rick
Figure 6: Camera 81, Image 18 by Rick

The final shot of this series (figure 6, above) emphasizes the official capacity of the Border Patrol agent, and by extension legitimates Rick’s observation and reporting. This image shows the male (im)migrant being arrested by a male border patrol officer. This photo
emphasizes the (im)migrant’s foreignness and the agent’s officialdom. The white, male officer, dressed in a green jacket and brimmed hat, has a gun holstered on his right hip. The arrest takes place near the agent’s vehicle that reads “Call us toll free/24 hours/1-877-USBP-HELP.” The (im)migrant stands with his hands clasped behind his head, as the agent seems to pat him down. The agent’s right hand covers the (im)migrants’ hands; this stance emphasizes the agent’s control and the whiteness of the agent’s skin in contrast to the (im)migrant’s brown skin. The agent’s authority also marks the Minutemen photographer as official, legitimate, and powerful in the space because his tip led to the arrest. Capturing the arrest and positioning it as the end of this photographic narrative seemingly validates Rick’s “read” on the man as an outsider and foreigner.

Rick’s photographic series relies upon assumptions of brown-skinned people as presumed foreigners and threats who are vilified and later removed from the nation’s boundaries. Rick’s “observation” leads to the (im)migrant’s arrest, which likely ends in deportation. In his work on deportation, Daniel Kanstroom characterizes state-sanctioned removal as “a powerful tool of discretionary social control, a key feature of the national security state, and a most tangible component of the recurrent episodes of xenophobia that have bedeviled our nation of immigrants. It is a mechanism of scapegoating, ostracism, family and community separation, and, of course, banishment” (5). Deportation is ultimately the high profile final act of xenophobic scapegoating directed at undocumented (im)migrants. Scapegoating starts much earlier than deportation, as evidenced in Rick’s photographic series. However, xenophobic scapegoating masquerades as authoritative nationalism as Rick claims to merely observe and report undocumented (im)migrants, thus fulfilling his patriotic duty. This narrative grants Minutemen, as US citizens, the right to defend the nation (by excluding others) based upon their
professed authority and legitimacy. These photographs create a veneer of legality and depicts the Minutemen’s actions as permissible and right.

**Dominance and Racialized Exclusionary Nationalism**

The Minutemen’s militarized presence at the border reflects their visions of nationalism through authority and domination. Through the content, framing, and photographic notes, the volunteers establish themselves as powerful authorities and patriots who can and will dominate those who enter the US without documentation. By focusing on weaponry, technology, and the treatment of the border as a war zone, the photography shows US citizens monitoring, regulating, and ultimately dominating the border landscape. The images also underscore the need for a heavily militarized border because an unseen but ever-present threat allegedly looms in the shadows.

Images of the border taken by Minutemen show the militarization and technology used to monitor the border and designate it as a battle-ready space. Visible equipment includes walkie-talkies, a small telescope mounted on a tripod, binoculars, and guns. Figure 7 (below) shows an older white man dressed in a collared shirt and sweater and wearing a brimmed hat. He appears to be speaking into a walkie-talkie and has a small telescope mounted on a tripod that sits upon a large boulder. This picture, like several others taken by Minutemen volunteers, displays the technology available to volunteers as they track (im)migrants. It is clear that they are tracking (im)migrants. Hunting and military metaphors are prevalent in border defense discourse, with vigilantes and federal officers using terms such as “spotting and reporting,” “intruders,” “mission,” or “open season” (Holling, “Patrolling” 104). Extending this argument, (im)migrants are seen and treated as “game” by their trackers, further dehumanizing them. This argument is further exemplified through image eight (below), which features a white, male Minutemen
volunteer. He sits hidden in the brush perched above the desert floor. Viewers see him from behind as he looks across the desert through binoculars, allowing him to spot and track (im)migrants from a distance. The volunteer is surrounded by gear including a backpack, gun, and walkie-talkie. He wears khaki pants, a green hat and shirt, and boots. His clothing, gun, and technology all demonstrate he is prepared to defend himself against unseen, but surely present, threats and to report those deemed a threat. Both images depict the volunteers as powerful and exacting dominance; they monitor, report, and detain those they perceive as threatening and unauthorized.

![Figure 7: Camera 10, Image 16 by Wayne](image1)

![Figure 8: Camera 81, Image 27 by Rick](image2)

As demonstrated in my analysis of the Minutemen photographic contributions to the BFP, anti-(im)migrant voices masquerade as patriots committed to advancing safety and security due to their tightly held nationalist ideologies. Yet, concerns about security translate into national or US-based security and only apply to presumed citizens or those identified as “true” members of the nation, which the photographs construct as white, US citizens. Holling has argued citizen observation groups such as the Minutemen work to recover “old idea(l)s, including men (with big guns) as saviors, colonies founded by white fathers, and ‘American’ as white, assimilated, and ‘melted,’ all of which help to maintain white supremacy” (“Patrolling” 112). The emphasis
on national security and racially restrictive ideas about who counts as a citizen or national insider is compounded by Minutemen’s treatment of (im)migrants as an animal-like threat who must be reported and ultimately deported to ensure the nation’s security. While race is not directly addressed in the photographer’s notes, the racialization of Mexican (im)migrants as illegitimate and undeserving of access to the US bears out in the photography. Brown-skinned people are read as (im)migrants without any actual proof of citizenship ties, while white men and women are assumed to have authority and legitimacy in protecting their land.

Migrants’ Photos: Rearticulating US Nationalism and Racial Scripts

The Minutemen photography offers a partial view of undocumented (im)migration and the US-Mexico border. Introducing another layer and viewpoint to the larger cultural conversation about (im)migration, the BFP pairs these photos with images captured by undocumented (im)migrants from Mexico and Latin American nations. While I critiqued the BFP organizers for replicating the language of the Minutemen by presenting the group as patriotic border observers, the project also features (im)migrants’ photographic contributions, which helps “make visible subjects who have been erased or devaluated by mainstream America” (Román-Odio 25). I evaluate the images submitted by (im)migrants and demonstrate how they challenge erasure, insert themselves into the US national imaginary by replicating dominant US nationalist thinking, and expose and revise pejorative US racial scripts.

Before analyzing the (im)migrant archive, I want to emphasize these images are mediated through the vision of BFP organizers. The project organizers visited (im)migrant shelters in Mexico in order to recruit (im)migrant photographers. They explained the intention of the

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107 Cameras were distributed in the following Mexican border cities: Naco, Agua Prieta, Sonoyta, and Ciudad Juarez.
project, how to use the camera, and incentivized (im)migrants’ participation with a Walmart gift card (with money added once the camera was returned). I believe, as literary scholars Clara Román-Odio and Marta Sierra have argued, that cultural texts produced by border subjects can “create news spaces for critical production,” break down “power asymmetries,” and “create new paradigms that can fully incorporate the stories of border crossers...committed to revealing and dismantling the structures of power that have drastically altered life in the area” (9-10). As I will show, many of the photos submitted by (im)migrants challenge existing power asymmetries between (im)migrants and Minutemen. Yet, recognizing the influence of the BFP organizers, as clearly demonstrated in the differing instructions and messages provided to Minutemen versus (im)migrants (below), the photos cannot be read as the unadulterated voices and perspective of undocumented (im)migrants.

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108 The camera package contained a stamped, pre-addressed envelope; a gift card with a $0 balance that money would be added to once the camera was returned; a disposable camera with 27 available shots; an index card describing the project, instructions for photography and return of camera, and space for the participants to share their name, hometown, and age, should they choose (“Camera Package”).
The instructional notecards reveal that (im)migrant and Minutemen participants received vastly different sets of instructions and introductions to the BFP. The Minutemen received a more detailed overview to the project and its purpose, as their notecard instructs participants to use their 27 photos “to show the public what it means to be a Minutemen,” particularly “things that people might not see in the media.” These guidelines suggest the BFP creators’ believe the media does not fully or accurately represent the volunteers’ service (or they at least want to appear sympathetic). Moreover, the notecard thanks the Minutemen for their “service,” and wishes them “good luck.” The instructions also outline the rewards for participating, including a $10 gas card and potential compensation should someone purchase the photos. Finally, the BFP creators only devote one line of the notecard to instructions for using the camera, thus assuming volunteers know how to use the disposable camera or could easily master this basic technology.

Conversely, the notecard issued to (im)migrants says nothing about the purpose of the project, who will view the photos, and does not offer (im)migrants “a cut” if someone were to purchase an image. The notecard also does not wish the (im)migrants “good luck,” extend best

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109 The notecard offers instructions in Spanish. Translated into English, it reads: “Use the flash for all photos, day and night; If there is little light, the flash will only reach two meters; For photos with people or objects, take the photo from one to three meters away; Do not cover the lens with your finger; Do not take photos of the border patrol or any police.” The translation is my own. The back of the notecard features a picture of a US mailbox.
wishes for a safe crossing, or remind (im)migrants not to take photos that could compromise their safety or reveal their presence to vigilantes or US Border Patrol. Instead, (im)migrants receive a brief and basic guide to using a disposable camera (in the causal and child-like Comic Sans typeface). A string of bullet points reminds them to turn on the flash, stand one to three meters from the subject, and not to cover the lens or take photos of law enforcement officials (the Minutemen are not discouraged from taking photos of Border Patrol agents). The instructions may have proved helpful to first-time users, but they are also pedantic and assume (im)migrants possess a rudimentary knowledge of technology or require repeated coaching when using the camera. Finally, the “migrant card” does not indicate they will receive a gift card for participating, though the “camera package” description on the web site suggests (im)migrants who submitted photos received a Walmart gift card. The set of instructions distributed to (im)migrants denies them the more complex introduction to the BFP extended to Minutemen and does not treat them as equal participants in the project.

The BFP instructions to (im)migrant participants and the creators’ explanatory setup of the photos certainly frame how viewers read (im)migrant’s contributions, but self-reported demographic information allows viewers to ascertain a few details about the (im)migrant contributors. The BFP creators met (im)migrants and distributed cameras in several Mexican border cities. Though the cameras were distributed in Mexico, persons who received the cameras and submitted photos self-identified as Honduran and Guatemalan, in addition to Mexicans from

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10 The basic layout and content of the migrants’ notecard suggests the BFP creators were influenced by the stereotypes that (im)migrants are undereducated or illiterate and thus unable to process more complex written instructions.

11 The site does not indicate the amount of money added to the Walmart cards or whether the project creators explained how and where recipients could use the gift card.

12 The images from (im)migrants featured on the BFP site were developed from cameras originally distributed in Sonoyta, Sonora (1), Naco, Sonora (8), Agua Prieta, Sonora (21), and Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua (5). Of the 35 images attributed to (im)migrants, 17 came from distinct cameras. The number of photographers remains unknown.
cities such as Hermosillo, Mexico City, and Tijuana. Few (im)migrants identify themselves by name, age, or place of origin, but the images and limited identifying details show a heterogeneous population (based upon sex, national identity, and age). For example, twenty one of the photos include only male-presenting subjects, five feature female-presenting subjects only, four include both male- and female-presenting people, and three are indecipherable. The (im)migrant photographers identifying their age range from early twenties to early thirties, though subjects appear to be as young as eight up to their fifties. Noting that the BFP organizers treat (im)migrant as a homogenous group, even if inadvertently, I want to underscore and remain cognizant of Susan C. Pearce, Elizabeth J. Clifford, and Reena Tandon’s warning that “By creating a platform where marginalized individuals can express their points of view, the risk is that the scholar will homogenize the group as if it shares a single culture, resulting in both a misrepresentation and a contribution to continuing the silence” (12).

Reinscribing US Nationalism

Photography documenting (im)migrants’ experiences at various points in Mexico and the US defy conventional representations of (im)migrants as outsiders or Others. They establish themselves as legitimate and potential members of the US national imaginary, thus aligning with one of the Minutemen’s nationalist scripts. In several photos, (im)migrants appear very natural and comfortable in the environment, which suggests a sense of belonging or legitimacy (an important strand of US nationalism). Rhetorician Lisa A. Flores contends (im)migrants “carry the border on them,” which can include internalizing oppressive ideas about their place (lack thereof) in the US (381). While I see evidence of (im)migrants’ “carry[ing] the border” in many cultural texts (e.g. Cándido in The Tortilla Curtain), I argue a selection of (im)migrant photography featured in the BFP shows (im)migrants’ refusal to allow the border and or
undocumented crossing to define them. I illustrate how (im)migrants employ the thread of US exclusionary nationalism rooted in belonging and legitimacy in a way that justifies their presence in the US.

(Im)migrants insert themselves into the US national imaginary by taking photos that present an assimilationist or “just like you” standpoint. For example, a photo taken by Juan Carlo from Honduras features a single male (im)migrant standing on a dirt path (figure 11, below). Noting the pink hues of the foothills in the backdrop, the photo was likely taken at dawn or dusk. The man looks like a tourist in his jeans, button-down shirt, and baseball cap. He smiles for the camera and seems relaxed. If not marked as an (im)migrant participating in the BFP, I would have read the image as a man on vacation trying to capture a photo-worthy shot of the beautiful, natural setting (blue sky, mountains in the background, green vegetation on either side of the path). In the same vein, a photo taken by Eduardo from Guatemala shows two men standing near a river (figure 12, below). Both men are dressed in jeans, and they smile for the camera as a duck swims near them. One man holds a bag of chips, and it looks like they could be at a picnic, hanging out at the water’s edge. Of course, this is not the case, as Eduardo’s photo caption reads: “Traveled from Ciudad Juarez, through New Mexico, Arizona, California, and Oregon; photos mailed from Georgia.” Both photos emphasize normality, as well as an appreciation for the US landscape. Rather than depicting (im)migrants as shadowy threats or a mass of invaders, these pictures paint (im)migrants as individuals with varied self-presentations (conveyed through dress and body language) and ways of framing or understanding their presence in the US.
Much of the dominant discourse appearing in Minutemen photos marked (im)migrants as bad or dangerous as a means of justifying exclusion. (Im)migrants reproduce but reverse the binary, depicting themselves as good, non-threatening, and average people. (Im)migration activists Subhash Kateel and Aarti Shahani question this tactic, challenging binary depictions of (im)migrants as good or bad (281), and instead suggest (im)migrants must demand rights and equitable treatment because “because Apartheid is wrong” (281). While the photos and limited commentary offer an incomplete vision of (im)migrants’ demands or expectations of the US, none demands rights or “misbehaves.” Instead, (im)migrants continually depict themselves as “good” and similar to the average US American.

Like the pictures above, the next selection of photos challenges dominant conceptions of (im)migrants as identifiable outsiders and Others. A series of photos taken by Armando from Mexico City and Hermosillo shows two men enjoying a meal and another sitting on a bench. Figure 13 (below) features two men seated at a table after finishing a meal. The older man, clad in Chicago Bulls jacket, is smiling and appears to be speaking. The after-dinner conversation takes place in a space with all white walls, which could easily be a safe house or a diner. The
ambiguous, yet comfortable setting marks the scene and the men in it as familiar. Armando’s caption for the photo reads: “Crossed New Mexico desert on Christmas Eve to minimize chances of being caught; camera mailed from Deming, NM.” Their border crossing strategy sought to minimize the chance of being spotted or recognized by US officials, but the photo depicts and recognizes them as cultural insiders, particularly the older man sporting the highly recognizable logo of a major US basketball franchise. A second shot from Armando’s photos series shows a man sitting on a city bench dressed in a hat, Bulls jacket (a different jacket than the previous photo), jeans, and tennis shoes (figure 14, below). He has a plastic shopping bag at his feet; the contents are not clear. He’s looking directly at the camera, demonstrating he is neither hiding nor out of place.
In addition to photos showing (im)migrants acting and dressing in ways that would be familiar to the mainstream white, US American viewer, thus underscoring their humanity and an overlapping cultural identity with US Americans, several images also include young children and families. Through these photos, (im)migrants insert their families into the US nation-state. Figure 15 (above) shows a young boy smiling for the camera. Figure 16 (above) features nine people at a table sharing a meal; the group includes five adults and four children, with three of the latter smiling for the camera. The presence of families with children (and children (im)migrating with families) challenges the depiction of men undertaking (im)migration alone. Further, photos show well-behaved children cared for by their families, which undermines US depictions of (im)migrants as likely public charges, especially minors who enter without adults, and a threat to US social services. Legal scholar Leticia M. Saucedo argues family and community provider narratives “are a powerful counterweight to U.S. public perception of migrants as undesirable forces in our society” (158). Images of families work to establish (im)migrants as familiar, non-threatening, and possessing values shared by (some) members of the US national imaginary.

The Rearticulation of Exclusionary US Nationalism

While some of the (im)migrant photos attempt to insert their subjects into the US national imaginary, other photos rearticulate dominant and exclusionary US nationalism. Michelle A. Holling describes rearticulation as “a process by which political interests, identities, and/or ideological themes that already resonate within society are discursively redefined, reorganized, or reinterpreted to produce new or unrecognized meanings or coherence” (“Dispensational” 76). I argue that some images appearing in the (im)migrant archive rearticulate familiar US discourses justifying (im)migrants’ exclusion from the US, particularly the construction of (im)migrants as dangerous or threatening to the US nation-state. For example, a selection of
photos submitted by (im)migrants shows how they rearticulate the dominant US discourse by focusing on the threat and violence suffered by (im)migrants.

Several images demonstrate the threat of (im)migration, by revealing the real and continuous dangers facing (im)migrants. For example, figure 17 (below) shows a female (im)migrant sitting in a wheelchair with her feet resting on a chair. Her hand covers her nose and mouth, concealing most of her face, and her eyes are shut. Her body language and effort to hide her face seemingly confirm popular portrayals of (im)migrants as people living in the shadows and fearful of being recognized. Upon closer inspection of this photo, especially when paired with figure 18 (below), the photographer clearly draws viewers’ attention to the condition of the women’s feet, which are heavily bandaged. Figure 18 shows the condition of the woman’s feet with the bandages removed. They are bloodied, blistered, and infected, though she has both feet and all ten toes. (Im)migrants routinely incur pain, physical harm, and even bodily mutilation as they (im)migrate to the US.113 These images reinforce popular US constructions of (im)migration as threatening, but rearticulate who is threatened by underscoring the bodily harm endured by (im)migrants. Further, the photos challenge the “masculinized elite” and militaristic ethos governing US security concerns, specifically the disregard for “the provision of basic necessities—such as shelter, health care, and food” (Falcón 121). The photographer rearticulates dominant “security issue” concerns, shifting focus from US national security to human security, which includes (im)migrants’ welfare.

113 The documentaries Wetback: The Undocumented Documentary (2005), De Nadie (2005), and Which Way Home (2009) all present the physical toll of (im)migration on the human body.
The photos reveal the range of threats facing (im)migrants as they (im)migrate and cross into the US, including the risk of drowning, being spotted by US Border Patrol, and the consumption of unsafe drinking water. Figure 19 (below) shows a red sign warning (im)migrants of the danger of drowning. The sign reads “Peligro” (danger) and “Corrientes Peligrosas” (dangerous currents) and shows a stick-figure image of a person struggling in the water. The symbol at the bottom of the sign is small, but the green, white, and red icon looks like the Mexican flag, which suggests the photo was taken while still in Mexico. Meanwhile, figure 20 (below) captures a green and white helicopter hovering above the ground. The photographer offers no commentary on the scene, but the helicopter’s green and white paint matches US Border Patrol land vehicles appearing in other photos in the archive. The helicopter appears very close, indicating the photographer may have been spotted and forced to flee.\textsuperscript{114} Further, the image shows the equipment available to US Border Patrol agents tracking and seeking to detain

\textsuperscript{114} My reading of this image, in particular, is shaped by the knowledge that this photographer is an (im)migrant. The same image, if taken by the Minutemen, would offer very different meaning.
undocumented (im)migrants, underscoring the power imbalance between (im)migrants and the US nation-state. Finally, figure 21 shows a man scooping water out of an animal trough. Based upon the frame, the trough seems to be in an isolated area. There are not any buildings in the frame, nor are there any animals. Water is scarce in the deserts, and many (im)migrants die of thirst. This water may be contaminated and could result in serious sickness and compromise the man’s heath and ability to reach his destination. Yet, without it, he risks dehydration and death. The image underscores the risks (im)migrants face crossing through the desert, rather than urban areas, in order to minimize the risk of detection and apprehension by US enforcement officials. This image highlights the state’s power in shaping (im)migration routes, which can place (im)migrants in unsafe or threatening situations.
Racial Counterscripts

The final stage of my analysis of BFP (im)migrant photography focuses on the racial counterscripts appearing within the photographic submissions. Natalia Molina describes counterscripts as the scripts racialized groups set forth that offer “alternatives or directly challenge dominant racial scripts” (*How Race* 7). As argued previously, several photos challenge popular conceptions of (im)migrants as shadow people or those forced by US laws to live in the shadows of the citizen population. While these images reinscribe elements of US nationalism, doing so relies upon challenging dominant racial scripts. Essentially, to be read as US American or as “belonging,” the images and the people featured must challenge dominant racial scripts marking (im)migrants as shadow people. Pointing to dominant depictions of (im)migrants, sociologist Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo argues (im)migrants are “Conspicuously absent from the macrostructural perspective is any sense of human agency or subjectivity. Rather than human
beings, immigrants are portrayed as homogenous, nondifferentiated objects responding mechanically and uniformly to the same set of structural forces” (6). The images featured in this section show how photographs taken by (im)migrants challenged the construction of (im)migrants as lacking subjectivity and undermined and reshaped the nation-state’s rhetorical and strategic efforts at racial fixity.

More than sixty percent of the photos archived as “migrant photos” present a clear image of an individual or group of (im)migrants. The photos clearly capture their faces, expressions, and present them as subjects with agency. Juan Carlos, age 29, from Honduras takes several photos of fellow (im)migrants. The note attached to the series of photos reads: “Traveled from Agua Prieta, through Arizona, to the Hoover Dam; camera mailed from Las Vegas.” One of these photos features two brown-skinned men walking along a highway (figure 22, below). They both look at the camera, one is smiling and carrying two jugs of water. Their relaxed body language, and the image as whole, differs considerably from the series of photos of the lone migrant—who shies away from the camera—taken by Rick from the vantage point of the Minutemen. Juan Carlos’ second photo (figure 23, below) also features two men, though different people than the previous image. These men also look directly at the camera and smile. Viewers can see both of their faces, though one man eats a chunk of bread, which blocks a portion of his face. They are sitting/laying on the ground, eating, and taking a break; they appear relaxed and in good spirits. The water jugs and a backpack are nearby, but at the time of the photograph, there is not much trash littering the area (a common complaint lodged against (im)migrants). Finally, figure 24, a photo taken by Miguel from Tijuana, Mexico, features seven male (im)migrants (they appear to range in age from twenties through forties). All seven men are looking at the camera. The two youngest looking men are smiling, while the others stand with
their arms crossed (or down to their sides) and look directly ahead. This photographer documents a more intimate space—the stacked mattresses suggest a shelter or safe house—but the men still appear relaxed and comfortable, perhaps indicating their trust in the photographer.

In each of these photos the (im)migrants look at or smile for the camera. They know they are being photographed, and do not shy away from the camera. Their body language and the proximity of the photographer to the subjects suggests they know the photographer and feel comfortable. The photographer chooses to feature faces rather than (im)migrants’ backs, lower bodies, or just the surrounding landscape. In fact, of photos posted to the Project site, a greater percentage of the (im)migrants’ photos include individuals’ faces, in comparison to the Minutemen. Thus, the shadowy, ambiguous threats depicted in the Minuteman’s pictures are
shown to be real individual human beings with expressions that reveal emotion and engagement. Further, the images capture (im)migrants in small groups, presenting the subjects as members of a trusted community. These images complicate US racial scripts marking undocumented (im)migrants as sneaky and suspicious or a homogenous mass of invaders as well as the divisive lines between “us” and “them.”

Conclusion

Twenty-first-century racial scripts infiltrating US legal and cultural (im)migration-themed texts position undocumented (im)migrants as threatening outsiders who the US must guard against. Yet, the racism embedded in these texts is often suppressed and denied, particularly in calls for border control, regulation, and closures, which separate race and nation. Those denying racism as a motivating factor for border defense and expulsion of undocumented people attempt to redirect the conversation toward a focus on the nation and national security. This laundering of racial scripts allows racism to masquerade as nationalism by highlighting how foreigners allegedly compromise US national security and identity. By seeking distance from racist border control discourse, anti-(im)migrant voices have attempted (often successfully) to make themselves more palatable to the US population. Their success lies in utilizing racial scripts marking people of color and foreigners as cultural outsiders and security threats, all the while espousing values of racial inclusiveness (connected to legalization programs and support for border control by people of color, law, and security) and national exclusiveness (undocumented (im)migrants have broken the law, are not citizens, and are not part of the national imaginary).¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ Catherine R. Squires contends, “the Right has recently amplified its use of…post-racial strategy in terms of religion and nation, arguing these categories provide more stability and possibility for social cohesion than race” (8).
The anti-(im)migrant discourse conveyed by the Minutemen photography in the Border Film Project relies upon variations of nationalism to blur evidence of race-based exclusion. US racial scripts marking Mexicans as inferior to and unwanted by US citizens are pervasive. These scripts are, however, reshaped through nation-based language that depicts (im)migrants as unwelcome because they are not citizens and have broken the rules of “legal” entry (and not because they are brown-skinned). The cultural texts convey nationalist thinking and rhetoric through expressions of authority, law abidance, loyalty to the nation, and defense of the nation and fellow citizens. Although conveyed as nationalism, the essential principles governing anti-(im)migrant discourse are rooted in racism and xenophobia. These anti-(im)migrant images depict undocumented (im)migrants as cultural, political, and security threats who compromise the safety and security of the US nation-state. Xenophobia (masquerading as patriotism), in turn, obscures race-based calls for expulsion of undocumented (im)migrants from the nation-state. Yet, exclusionary nationalist ideologies rooted in belonging are, at times, embraced by (im)migrants as well. The (im)migrant photographers who contribute to the Border Film Project draw upon a strand of US nationalist thinking that establishes legitimacy in the US border regions as a condition for belonging. By performing as cultural insiders, (im)migrants attempt to insert themselves into the US national imaginary, thus strengthening and validating the ties between belonging and legitimacy. However, (im)migrants also reject aspects of racialized exclusionary nationalism by articulating racial counterscripts that expose and undermine the dominant US racial logic informing the exclusion and expulsion of undocumented (im)migrants in the contemporary US.
CHAPTER 4: UNDOCUMENTED (IM)MIGRATION AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

In the first three chapters, I showed how US (im)migration legislation has relied upon regressive and divisive ideologies concerning gender, class, and nation, to justify (im)migrants’ exclusion from the nation-state. Further, I argued the role of race and racism in US (im)migration policy and dominant cultural treatments of (im)migrants is minimized or obscured due to a focus on gender and sexuality, class, and nation. The previous chapters also showed how some pro- and anti-(im)migrant cultural texts employ similar logic—rooted in the suppression of race and instead fixated on gender, class, or nation— as justification for (im)migrants’ inclusion or exclusion from the US nation-state. Although I acknowledged the importance of intersectional analysis in the introduction of this project, I primarily treated class, gender, and nation as separate issues in the first three chapters to underscore how each functions in relation to race in (im)migration discourse. In this chapter, I evaluate the emergence of what I am calling “localism” in (im)migrant-themed political and cultural discourse. By localism, I mean a set of concerns and identities produced within a geographical site smaller in scale than the state or nation. Further, this geographically concentrated discourse is informed by class, gender, and nation-based ideologies that community insiders seek to prioritize, protect, and defend.116 For example, in the documentary Border War, an interviewee calls on lawmakers to earmark state monies for US citizens’ education instead of allocating resources to undocumented (im)migrants, who are depicted as siphoning funds from deserving US Americans. I argue the previously discussed discourses work together within the local frame, revealing intricate linguistic strategies for suppressing the role of race and racism in contemporary US (im)migration discourse.

116 Discussing the concept of local knowledge, Geographer Trevor Barnes indicates, “while knowledge is produced at local sites [contexts], it increasingly travels” (423). Local concerns, particularly the defense of specific identities and values, travel and can become the concerns/knowledge of a broader population.
In this chapter, I show how contemporary laws and cultural texts depict (im)migration as a transnational issue with the greatest impact on local populations. Using Arizona SB 1070 and two documentaries—Kevin Knoblock’s *Border War: The Battle over Illegal Immigration* (2006) and Roy Germano’s *The Other Side of Immigration* (2009)—I evaluate how these texts depict transnational undocumented (im)migration as a necessarily local issue. Specifically, the documentaries assert that US and Mexican federal representatives ineffectively manage (im)migration via the US-Mexico border. Revealing this failure, the documentarians show the consequences for smaller communities and their residents, thus framing (im)migration as a “local” issue. Similar logic later informed the design and passage of Arizona’s SB 1070 and an array of copycat laws.117 Treating undocumented (im)migration as a local issues reveals a popular belief that federal leaders and policies fail to protect citizens from undocumented (im)migration. Thus, the texts recommend local action and activism to protect the community, which gives locals *carte blanche* to determine who belongs. Depicting local as a political and social identity shaped by class, gender, and nation-based ideologies further conceals the role of race in US (im)migration discourse.

**Arizona SB 1070**

The US Constitution grants the federal government, specifically Congress, purview over all matters concerning naturalization (Chacón, “Who is Responsible”). The question of whether control over naturalization encompasses (im)migration legislation and enforcement has spurred political disputes, legal action, and state-level involvement in (im)migration reform and

117 Kraehenbuehl notes that within a year of 1070 passing, twenty other states were considering imitative laws to combat the “the federal government’s failure to fully enforce immigration law” (1470-1). Commenting on the motivation and intense organization of these copycat laws, Nik Theodore argues, “This diffusion of SB 1070 avatars is not the result of some spontaneous upsurge in state-level, anti-immigrant policymaking. Rather, it is part of an organized and well-funded attempt to rewrite immigration policy by a network of policy advocates” (98).
restriction. The US federal government permitting and encouraging state-level assistance in enforcing federal laws makes the dispute over (im)migration policy and enforcement even murkier (Kraehenbuehl 1483). Commenting on dual-level enforcement, legal expert James A. Kraehenbuehl argues, “The reliance on states for enforcement is fraught with difficulties…as it provides states an opportunity to express their policy preferences by varying their levels of enforcement” (1483), including the over- and under-enforcement of federal (im)migration law.

State involvement in (im)migration policy and enforcement draws attention to federal ineffectiveness while also spotlighting undocumented (im)migrants’ effect on local populations. State legislators claim to understand and protect the interests of local border region citizens from threatening outsiders, as exemplified by Arizona’s SB 1070, also known as “Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act.” SB 1070 relocates the dialogue on the perils of undocumented (im)migration from national to local levels, thus marking (im)migration as a relevant and immediate concern requiring local actors’ attention.

The state of Arizona entered the fray over (im)migration control after Governor Jan Brewer signed Arizona SB 1070 into law on April 23, 2010. A strict, “anti-illegal” (im)migration measure, SB 1070 targets undocumented (im)migrants whose entry into and presence in the US is deemed unlawful by the federal government, thus prompting supporters’ insistence that the legislation aligns with federal law. Although passed at the state level, SB

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118 This chapter focuses on restriction-based state laws, particularly SB 1070, that over-enforce federal (im)migration laws. However, some states and cities practice under enforcement or implement “sanctuary laws.” Kraehenbuehl indicates states such as Oregon and Alaska and cities such as San Francisco “express their discontent with the federal immigration system by passing laws that prohibit local authorities from assisting federal immigration law enforcement,” including prohibiting “local law enforcement from checking the immigration status of people they arrest or from forwarding that information to federal authorities” (1469).

119 While Brewer signed 1070 in law, this is not the first restrictive, anti-(im)migrant legislation passed by Arizona legislators. Previous legislation includes “the Protect Arizona Now ballot initiative in 2004, which required proof of citizenship or legal residence from anyone registering to vote or applying to receive public benefits” as well as 2006 and 2008 legislation taking “local and state officials with responding to the immigration crisis.” In each of the previous instances, then-Governor Janet Napolitano vetoed the actions. (Thornburgh 3).
1070, also known as the “Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act” depicts (im)migrants as a threat at the community or neighborhood level. SB 1070 marks (im)migrants as a threat and justifies their exclusion from the community as a step toward protecting and supporting Arizonans, or inhabitants who reside “legally” in the state. This framework places a spotlight on security, while remaining vague about the cultural and political ideologies that construct (im)migrants as a threat and the race-based tactics employed by enforcement officials (and legalized by the legislation) for identifying and removing undocumented (im)migrants from Arizona neighborhoods.

SB 1070 overtly names undocumented (im)migrants as unwelcome “aliens” whose presence defies US federal and state (im)migration law. The bill’s “Intent” section reads, “The legislature declares that the intent of this act is to make attrition through enforcement the public policy of all state and local government agencies in Arizona. The provisions of this act are intended to work together to discourage and deter the unlawful entry and presence of aliens and economic activity by persons unlawfully present in the United States” (1). In order to accomplish “attrition through enforcement,” the Act allows for deliberate persecution when “reasonable suspicion exists that the person is an alien who is unlawfully present in the United States” (1). Under 1070, persecution of “aliens” and “reasonably suspicious” persons takes on several forms, For example, SB 1070 requires Arizona law enforcement officials to determine the (im)migration status (demanding federal authorization documents) of arrested or detained persons if there is reasonable suspicion they are not in the US legally. Reasonable suspicion is never defined and apparently determined at the officer’s discretion (a later section of the law protects them from lawsuits), which has provoked widespread public debate, with human rights
groups, border activists, politicians, and pundits discussing the merits and pitfalls of the regulatory bill.

From its enactment by the Arizona legislature through Supreme Court hearings, critics have condemned 1070 for inviting and upholding racial profiling. Opponents condemn SB1070 and its “reasonable suspicion” decree as part of a broader legal program that has “helped create a new McCarthyism in which race, religion and appearance constitute evidence” (ARIZONA 1). The American Civil Liberties Union concludes 1070 invites “racial profiling of Latinos and others who may look or sound ‘foreign,’ including many US citizens who have lived in America their entire lives” (“What’s at Stake?”). Supporters of 1070 deny these charges, though a week after signing the original legislation into law, Governor Brewer signed an amended version of 1070, to “make it crystal clear and undeniable that racial profiling is illegal” (Newton and Rough).

In an effort to ensure the safety (physical, economic, cultural) of people defined as Arizonans, the Act unofficially authorizes law enforcement officials to detain those “reasonably suspected” of being undocumented and demand “papers” in order to investigate immigration status (1070). Although racial profiling is explicitly outlawed by the amendment, brown-skinned persons are nevertheless more likely to be reasonably suspected of being undocumented, as exemplified through enforcement efforts targeting specific neighborhoods. Anthropologist Luis

120 The Supreme Court struck down additional provisions in June 2012—over two years after Brewer signed 1070 into law. These provisions permitted police to arrest without a warrant persons believed to be deportable and treated (im)migrants who failed to carry “papers” or who sought work without authorization as criminals (“What’s at Stake?”). The Supreme Court ruling mandated state officials apply the law evenly; yet, the language and intent of the law set the stage for de facto racial profiling.

121 The amended law, HB 2162, explicitly outlawed using race as means of identifying undocumented (im)migrants, and eliminated provisions requiring police to arrest crime victims who cannot prove they are in the country legally (Theodore 98). Although the amended legislation prohibits racial profiling, public policy expert Nik Theodore argues, “the larger context of the bill’s passage makes clear that Arizona legislators are prepared and willing to use racial profiling tactics as instruments of policing and social control” (94). Arizona legislators and backers of 1070 aggressively deny race and racism factor into the state’s management of undocumented (im)migration.
F. B. Plascencia notes, “What is left unstated is that the strategy is a class-and racial/ethnic group-based scheme. Local police seeking to carry out the provisions in the law” focus their patrols in “neighborhoods were lower-income Mexican descent and other racialized minorities live; affluent neighborhoods…remain outside the gaze of police” [sic] (117). Thus, undocumented (im)migrants, or those who “appear” undocumented—often based upon phenotype, language, class markers, and behavior deemed suspicious or foreign—are constructed as a threat and subject to deportation, but law enforcement presence and monitoring of specific neighborhoods is justified as a means of keeping Arizonans safe. Although this discourse argues that the motivation for this monitoring is the preservation of local quality of life, I argue that race continues to play a crucial role in these texts’ divisive ideologies.

SB 1070 establishes borders and a mentality rooted in restriction at the local level. The title “Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act” suggests the public must take an active role in safeguarding Arizona communities, thus reinforcing borders between Arizonans (perceived as US citizens) and undocumented (im)migrants. As Nik Theodore argues, “borders are not simply located at the outer limits of the national territory — they are located everywhere there are circuits through which the movement of people and goods occurs” (102). With undocumented (im)migrants targeted and vilified by the legislation, the titular emphasis on neighborhoods encourages a figurative redrawing of the borders (im)migrants cross or trespass. With this in mind, I argue the term “local” spans beyond a geographic concept to include the character and needs of native-born actors. In particular (im)migration-themed rhetoric that zeros

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122 Sociologist Philip Kretsedemas notes the selective screening ensures “any person, regardless of their legal status, who exhibits ‘suspicious behavior’ and emits signs of ‘foreign culture’ could be targeted if he or she enters a zone where these enforcement practices are in effect” (338).
in on the local seeks to emphasize how citizens embody particular gender, economic, and nation-based norms that must be protected and defended from corrupt outside forces. The focus on “local” character attempts to turn attention away from race and ethnicity, instead suggesting an aesthetic of belonging is contingent upon gender roles and family dynamics, economic contribution to the community, and citizenship. An emphasis on the local (or neighborhood-level) impact of undocumented (im)migration permeated cultural texts well before the passage of Arizona’s “Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act,” underscoring how ideologies circulating in the cultural realm can influence or shape political action, rather than just a one-way flow from political discourse to cultural texts.

Governor Brewer’s public statements on SB 1070 and racial profiling and analysis of the law offer insight on the “official” role of race in (im)migration discourse. In contrast, both documentaries I analyze feature local voices of everyday people who articulate a “localized rhetoric,” which can reveal “meanings that may be missed when examining only the rhetoric of prominent leaders” (Holling, “Dispensational” 70). While prominent US American leaders, such as Brewer, vigorously deny that racism motivates state-sponsored (im)migration reform and enforcement, an examination of “localized” rhetoric reveals the more complicated relationship between race and (im)migration discourse. As I will show, both anti- and pro-(im)migrant cultural texts (Border War and The Other Side, respectively) use the concept of “localism” and the protection of community values and insiders to shift attention away from the presence of race in (im)migration discourse.

**Border War: Local Battles over Undocumented (Im)migration**

Director Kevin Knoblock’s documentary, *Border War: The Battle over Illegal Immigration* (2006), features the stories of five US citizens whose personal or professional lives
in the US-Mexico borderlands have been influenced by US border policies. Through a series of interviews the documentary spotlights local residents—people on the “frontlines”—working to ensure the safety of their families and communities from the alleged threat of undocumented (im)migration. The nature of the threat varies, but interviewees cite (im)migrants’ overuse of educational services and financial resources intended for citizens, criminal behavior, and the growing cost of monitoring the US-Mexico border as threats facing individuals and communities in the US borderlands region. The construction of undocumented (im)migrants as threats against “safe neighborhoods” draws upon racial scripts broadly marking Latinos (and Mexicans specifically) as undesirable outsiders. However, the filmmakers and anti-(im)migrant interviewees deny that calls for (im)migrants’ exclusion or expulsion are rooted in racial discrimination, and the filmmakers’ supports this stance by underscoring the racial and ethnic diversity of US law enforcement agents, politicians, and activists who vocally oppose undocumented (im)migration. This emphasis is significant because it suggests local residents, regardless of racial or ethnic identity, support closed-border policies, thus denying that race factors into (im)migrants’ exclusion or the construction of (im)migrants as a threat to local citizens. I argue that by shifting the conversation about unauthorized entry and the exclusion of undocumented (im)migrants from a race-based issue to an emphasis on the lives of local actors, *Border War* encourages viewers to disassociate anti-(im)migrant attitudes and policies from racism.

The film and anti-(im)migrant interviewees object to (im)migrants’ unlawful presence in the US, declaring (im)migrants break the law by entering and/or residing in the US without

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123 Representative J.D. Hayworth use the war terminology term “frontlines” during his interview.
124 Diversity within the featured anti-migrant cohort means white or Mexican American.
authorization. Although the documentary suggests legality is the sole determinant for inclusion or exclusion from the US nation-state, local people’s concerns about (im)migrants’ ability to embody the values and character of their community shape resistance to (im)migrants’ presence. I argue exclusionary localism works to protect the US racial order by marking brown foreigners as unwelcome outsiders on the basis of gender, class, or nation, rather than racial identity. 

*Border War* depicts (im)migrants as unsuitable community members by highlighting perceived economic theft (jobs, services, draining the system, not contributing), lack of history within and connection to the community, and the stories of US Americans whose lives are negatively altered by undocumented (im)migrants. Each of these sentiments supporting exclusion draws upon racial scripts marking (im)migrants as unwelcome, inferior outsiders, with *Border War* pathologizing (im)migrants in its calls for protecting local US populations and their economic, political, and social identities. Yet, when oppositional voices charge anti-(im)migrant advocates with race-based exclusion, the latter refutes this charge by pointing to the “diversity” among anti-(im)migrant, closed-border advocates and their commitment to upholding US law. Emphasizing diversity among closed-border advocates allows racist articulations of what constitutes local identity and calls for (im)migrants’ exclusion to masquerade as race-neutral ideologies.

While my analysis of *Border War* critiques the documentary’s suppression of race and racism in border defense discourse, reviews of the film tend to focus on the political leanings of producer David N. Bossie of Citizens United, the terror faced by (im)migrants as victims of unscrupulous coyotes, and the film’s focus on US citizens affected by undocumented (im)migration.¹²⁵ For example, in his review, James Pinkerton of *Newsday* refers to Bossie as a

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¹²⁵ *Border War* is produced by Citizens United, a conservative group dedicated to restoring the US government to its citizens.
“cultural warrior” who brings a “hawkish, pro-wall perspective to the border issue,” but suggests the film’s tone and intent differs from the “heavy-handed propagandizing of, say, Michael Moore.” Similarly, Mariel Garza of the *Los Angeles Daily News* describes the film as “even-handed if mostly action-free vignettes about five people’s lives affected by illegal immigration.” Depicting Bossie’s vision and the film as even-handed and relatively neutral (in contrast to Moore) is misleading and fails to address the local actors’ motivations and actions for expelling (im)migrants from their communities. Shifting focus to concerns about (im)migrants’ safety, Dick Morris of the *Laurel Leader-Call* writes, “The Citizens United film documents how our porous border invited coyotes to exploit would-be immigrants and invites human trafficking. It emphasizes the risk to the immigrant and to the country of a border that can be breached, but only at great danger to those who try it.” Morris acknowledges the dangers faced by (im)migrants, but places the blame largely on the shoulders of coyotes, without evaluating US border management and enforcement policies. Finally, reviewers also comment on the film’s “local” take on undocumented (im)migration. Tony Hicks of the *Contra Costa Times* writes, “The film documents the lives of people it says are victims of lax immigration policies at the U.S./Mexico border.” And, returning to Garza’s review, she notes the documentary “features homegrown people, places and issues.” Both reviews highlight the local emphasis, but seem to accept that only US citizens and their viewpoints comprise “local” identities and issues. Critics’ evaluations of *Border War* reinforce the film’s depiction of (im)migrants as outside the “local” identity and fail to critique the (racialized) violence many (im)migrants face while living in the US.

Recognizing the lack of commentary on the relationship between localism and racism in the documentary’s border defense narratives, I interrogate the implications of focusing on local
communities as victims of undocumented (im)migration. Localism is both a nebulous and complicated identifier, changing meaning dependent upon place, space, and time. It creates insiders who establish the parameters of a community, particularly who belongs and on what basis. Within *Border War*, “local” functions as a cultural identity expressed by a commitment to the nuclear family, US nation-state, and the security and prosperity of insiders. Further, because “belonging is performed through exclusion” (J. Johnson 38), divisions between insiders and outsiders are clearly demarcated to safeguard the values and character of the local community from the influence of foreigners, or those excluded from the local.

The film takes several steps toward recognizing and validating undocumented (im)migration as a local issue in the US. Local is constructed as a defense of community insiders’ personal, familial, and economic security, which suppresses the presence of racism in this strain of border defense discourse. As I will discuss, *Border War* acknowledges undocumented (im)migration as a (trans)national issue, and charges the US federal government with failing to protect citizens. According to *Border War*, citizens (at the local level) are forced to intervene, thus validating the local framework. Additionally, the filmmakers’ construct the “border war” as a political, cultural, and economic battle waged in the protection of local interests, thus defying charges of race-based exclusion. Supporting this claim, *Border War* highlights the racially diverse (Mexican and white US Americans) identities of local, closed-border advocates. Yet, the local insiders clamoring for (im)migrants’ exclusion are all phenotypically white. Meanwhile, the sole pro-(im)migrant stance comes from a brown-skinned Mexican-American border activist, and (im)migrants appearing in background shots generally have brown skin and are treated as a threat. *Border War* strategically uses race to mark people
with brown skin, whether (im)migrants or US citizens, as outsiders, while directly denying race
motivates (im)migrants’ exclusion or informs exclusionary localism.

*When the Federal Government Fails, Locals Must Act*

In response to the federal government’s inaction or ineffective handling of “illegal immigration,” *Border War* indicates locals living in the border region must (and do) act on behalf of themselves and their communities to protect their economic, political, cultural, and personal well-being. According the documentary’s official web site, *Border War* deliberately focuses on local populations, because detailing the firsthand experiences of those “affected by the massive rise in illegal immigration—primarily via the porous US southern border with Mexico,” encourages viewers “to visualize this massive problem through the eyes of those involved” (“About the Film”). The documentary explores how undocumented (im)migration into the US affects citizens, their families, their communities, and lives on a local stage, while also marking specific people and identities as local insiders (and implicitly marking others as outsiders). Yet, the filmmakers must first justify why local actors must intervene in a federal and transnational issue.

*Border War* labels undocumented (im)migration as a transnational issue, specifically involving the US and Mexico. The filmmakers incorporate clips of press conferences featuring former Presidents George W. Bush (US) and Vicente Fox (Mexico) discussing the issue and impact of undocumented (im)migration. Former Arizona Congressman J.D. Hayworth, a closed-border advocate, criticizes both leaders for failing to reduce undocumented entry into the US. Hayworth advocates for an enforcement-first border policy and condemns the Bush
administration for taking a lax stance on border enforcement. Hayworth indicates, “When the President is right, I’m with him. And when he’s wrong, I respectfully take issue with him. And, sadly, on this issue, despite saying some things that sound right…it’s the same old program.” And, by “same old program” Hayworth means the US government’s reluctance to secure the border and protect its citizens from “illegal immigration.” When asked whether “these people [(im)migrants] would be coming across George Bush’s ranch if it were on the border with Mexico,” Hayworth responds, “Oh, I think there’d be some tight security if Crawford were on the border.” His commentary suggests the US could police and secure the border with the right motivation (e.g. protecting the President or the property of wealthy citizens), but they choose not to act or safeguard places like Douglas, AZ (a city in Hayworth’s district) where “everyday” people live. With the US federal government failing to act in the best interests of its citizens, particularly people living in the borderlands region, Border War shows local citizens demanding action, challenging Bush’s stance, and intervening to protect themselves and their communities, thus paralleling SB 1070’s calls to protect neighborhoods.

Border War alleges the US federal government’s mishandling of illegal (im)migration has devastated borderlands citizens. A series of interviews with Teri March, wife of slain Deputy David March, underscores this point by depicting the unchecked entry of undocumented (im)migrants as lethal. March describes her husband’s killer, Armando Garcia, as a drug dealer and murderer who spoke openly about his intentions to kill a cop prior to the deputy’s death. March’s killer is referred to as Armando Garcia in the film; other reports identify him as Jorge Arroyo Garcia. Shifting focus from Garcia’s crime, the film and March emphasize his unauthorized presence in

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126 Hayworth’s “enforcement first” approach includes enforcing existing laws, closing loopholes gamed by “illegals” and “open borders crowd,” and enforcing sanctions against employers who knowingly employ “illegals.” As he’s saying this, the film shifts to images of brown-skinned men standing in a parking lot seeking day labor opportunities. The film, if not Hayworth, constructs (im)migrants as devious, brown-skinned outsiders.

127 March’s killer is referred to as Armando Garcia in the film; other reports identify him as Jorge Arroyo Garcia.
the US. March states, “He was here illegally. He’d been deported three times before.” By framing Garcia first and foremost as an “illegal” (im)migrant, the film points the (im)migration and deportation systems’ failure to keep citizens safe. March also reflects on the legal system’s inability to enact justice because Garcia returned to Mexico. She notes, “killers that are Mexican nationals, illegal immigrants here in our country, if they flee back to their country, they will not be extradited back to the United States” without assurances the defendant will not face the death penalty.

March’s frustration and disappointment with the US legal system underscores how US (im)migration and legal policies fail to protect citizens’ interests. Disheartened, March requests the Bush administration’s assistance in pursuing her husband’s killer, indicating “I met our President at a National Police Memorial. And speaking to him, it was very brief, but I said, ‘Mr. President, my husband…was murdered. His killer fled to Mexico. We have no justice and we can’t bring this guy back to the United States without you.’” March says Bush told her, “we’re gonna get this guy”; yet, months pass with no progress. Again, feeling let down by the federal government, March sends the President letters “pleading with him to fulfill his promise.”128 The interview thread featuring Teri March depicts a local woman, a citizen, and victim of undocumented (im)migration forced to lobby for her husband’s killer’s arrest and conviction, because the federal government failed to protect her husband from an undocumented (im)migrant and then failed to deliver a swift conviction and closure for the family. March calls upon the federal government to offer greater support to US citizens in the battle against undocumented (im)migration, which aligns with the language and alleged intent of SB 1070 in protecting local interests from the gaps in federal (im)migration policy.

128 Nearly five years later, the US courts tried and convicted Garcia for David March’s murder.
Rallying against lax border enforcement, some local citizens and closed-border activists participate in border monitoring activities, join anti-(im)migration rallies, and back political candidates and representatives who support restrictive (im)migration. For example, Lupe Moreno, the head of Latinos for Immigration Reform, identifies (im)migration as a “problem” the US needs to address immediately, arguing US leaders have not effectively handled the issue. She condemns political decisions allowing “illegal aliens” to obtain driver’s licenses or benefit from government programs as evidence of this failure. Opposing (im)migrants’ presence in the US and use of services supposedly meant for US citizens, Moreno supports anti-(im)migration activists and political candidates such as Jim Gilchrist and Chris Simcox and organizes and participates in border monitoring activities and (im)migration reform rallies.

Following Moreno’s commentary on closed-border advocacy, the documentary cuts to a clip of Bush stating he opposes vigilante presence and action at the US-Mexico border. Moreno takes umbrage with Bush characterizing her work as vigilantism, calling the description “ridiculous,” though noting “in Spanish vigilante…means watchful. And what do I say to him? Damn right I’m watchful.” Moreno constructs her commitment to closed-border advocacy as the watchful and mindful work of a citizen concerned about the political, economic, and cultural landscape of the US, and as the necessary work of those on the “frontlines” when the US federal government fails to protect its citizens.

Who and What Constitutes “Local”

Having established undocumented (im)migration as scourge on border region inhabitants,
the documentary features four anti-(im)migrant interviewees portraying (im)migrants as unsuitable community members. According to Teri March, Lupe Moreno, Congressman J.D. Hayworth, and Border Patrol Agent Jose Luis Maheda, (im)migrants are outsiders who threaten citizens’ bodies, their livelihood, and the local cultural identity. *Border War* shows local residents lobbying against undocumented (im)migration in support for the “common good.” This approach reflects what anthropologist Jonathan Xavier Inda refers to as exclusionary logic. He explains, “The logic is simple: if immigrants pose a threat to the common good, their exclusion or elimination is necessary in order to guard the well-being of the nation. The repudiation of the immigrant is thus justified in the name of protecting the welfare of the social body” (134). As I will show in this section, interviewees cultivate a specific image of local “social body,” revealing who and what they seek to defend in their calls for secure-borders.

Collectively, the interviewees point to (im)migrants’ economic theft, lack of connection to the community, and negative effect on US families as rationale for (im)migrants’ exclusion. Although interviewees never cite race as central to the “social body” or a reason for excluding (im)migrants, the concerns about family, community, and economics house racial scripts marking (im)migrants as unwelcome, undesirable, and inferior outsiders. Literary scholar Jodi Melamed argues understanding “racialization beyond color lines in liberal-capitalist modernity” is made easier through critical race theorist Nikhil Singh’s definition of race as “‘historic repertoires and cultural and signifying systems that stigmatize and depreciate one form of humanity for the purposes of another’s health, development, safety, profit or pleasure’” (13). The stigmatization of (im)migrants as outsiders who compromise US Americans’ way of life relies upon casting (im)migrants as economic, national, and racial outcasts.
Former Congressman J.D. Hayworth (R, AZ) indicates one of the hidden costs of “illegals” living in the US is the strain placed on US citizens living in the border region. Commenting on the towns and people living on the “frontlines of illegal immigration,” Hayworth states they are “being torn asunder by costs, by criminal elements, and by the strain of law-abiding Americans getting up every day, trying to live their lives, trying to do their jobs, trying to educate their children in an atmosphere that is becoming increasingly hostile…there’s a fear, they’ve not given up, but it has made life very, very difficult for them.” According to Hayworth, undocumented (im)migrants create a hostile atmosphere for hard-working, law-abiding citizens who just want to do their jobs and educate their children. In Hayworth’s estimation, these are values US citizens possess; in contrast, undocumented (im)migrants are law-breaking bottom-feeders. Because Hayworth subscribes to and supports these divisions, he is shocked when his opponents call him “grotesque” for wanting to “defend the border” and “close loopholes that have been gamed over the years by illegals and by the open borders crowd.” In his use of the term “gamed,” Hayworth depicts (im)migrants as sneaky and distrustful for not using the defined legal channels of entry.

Hayworth presents the (legal) residents of his district (Arizona’s 5th) as victims of an uncontrolled border, but remains vague on who and what counts as local (though undocumented (im)migrants definitely fall outside this identifier). Through Lupe Moreno’s and Teri March’s respective stories, the filmmakers offer viewers a clearer understanding of local character, values, and identities. The women’s stories underscore how national identity, shaped by the class- and gender- based concerns of US citizens, trumps race.

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131 Hayworth reads a newspaper article arguing that he advocates for border security and defense “East German-style.” Hayworth retorts, “there’s one major difference they’re forgetting about: the East Germans were keeping people in.” Conversely, Hayworth just wants to keep certain people out.
Lupe Moreno establishes herself as a local and defender of her community against underserving and destructive (im)migrants. The first words viewers hear from Moreno are, “I was born in Redding, CA,” thus legitimating her history and ties to the US nation-state. Moreno discusses her upbringing in California, noting her father ran a safe house for (im)migrants. She claims his illegal activities and the stress of “illegals” living in the family home lead to the collapse of her parents’ marriage and her mother leaving the family, thus exposing Moreno to unwanted attention from male (im)migrants. She states, “One of the things I work at is trying to undo the damage my dad did.” To this point, Moreno has suggested her father’s involvement in safe house activities destroyed her family. Yet, she frames her grievances against (im)migrants in economic terms. Thus, Moreno suggests that calls for closed-borders and (im)migrants’ expulsion from local communities serve to protect the social and economic rights guaranteed to US citizens. Moreno contends that (im)migrants’ presence in her neighborhood compromises the quality of the public schools, forcing her to “spend $500 a month to send [her] granddaughter to a private school because that’s the only chance she has at a future.” As Moreno is speaking, a sign reading “English for the Children” appears on screen, which supports her claims of a broken political system that fails to support (English monolingual) US citizens. Again emphasizing how (im)migrants diminish the social and economic rights guaranteed to US citizens, Moreno states, “Our legislator said we have no money to give veterans an education…but then the next bill up was to give illegal aliens in-state tuition. And what do they do? We have money for that. We have money to give illegal aliens in-state tuition.” Her commentary establishes a divide between deserving citizens and undeserving...
“illegal aliens,” and as Jodi Melamed indicates, “Denying undocumented students mobility through higher education is just one strategy that racializes immigrants as fugitive populations” (156). Moreno depicts economic security and control as a component of localism that community members must work to protect, thus local becomes a privileged class that is distinct from a purely geographic meaning.

Teri March also comments on how undocumented (im)migrants compromise the rights of US citizens. Unlike Moreno, March never shares where she was born or raised. The film allows her whiteness and marriage to a white, male US sheriff to mark her as cultural and local insider. March’s first interview takes place in her home, where she is surrounded by reminders of her husband, including his badge, a US flag enclosed in a display box, and photos of the couple’s wedding day. The camera frequently captures March looking through scrapbooks containing family photos and newspaper clippings memorializing her late husband. Viewers see March crying as she visits her husband’s grave and discusses how her life was destroyed by his murder and lack of justice. The March interviews treat the nuclear family as an essential component of localism that community members must work to support and defend. Yet, race also informs who counts as or is considered local.

Race factors into March’s narrative and condemnation of “illegal immigrants,” as *Border War* makes whiteness and white lives the central concern of narratives about undocumented (im)migration. The filmmakers introduce race into the narrative through subtext. Through photos and editing, *Border War* emphasizes how a brown-skinned, Mexican national took away the dreams of a white, US American woman. The screen shifts from a teary-eyed March to photos of Garcia. Viewers see images of police arresting him and his mugshot; he is dirty, unkempt, and flanked by officers. The filmmakers’ use Garcia, rather than one of the millions of economic
(im)migrants who never commit violent crimes, to represent undocumented (im)migration and its consequences, thus supporting popular stereotypes of brown-skinned people as criminals and a danger to white US Americans. In contrast, March attends vigils for her husband and is surrounded by supportive community members and police officers; she is positioned as a white, US American woman victimized by a brown, Mexican man. While Teri March is undoubtedly a grieving widow, the filmmakers contrast her whiteness and femininity to Garcia’s brownness in order to solidify an anti-(im)migrant stance supposedly based in national exclusion. Further, the film and March vilify (im)migrants on the basis of race and nation, with March allowing the actions of her husband’s killer—a Mexican national who the US had deported previously—to represent the many, and the filmmakers validating this sentiment by framing her as the doe-eyed victim of foreigners “who took [her] dreams away.” March frames her crusade as a quest for justice, yet the film’s depiction of her husband’s killer shows how US racial scripts frame Mexicans as non-normative, threatening, and outside the US imaginary and local character. The March interviews depict (im)migrants as threatening the values and aesthetic of local communities and inhabitants, specifically the white, heteronormative, nuclear family.

*Local as Multicultural*

While I have argued that localism and racism intersect in calls for protecting local US border populations from undocumented (im)migrants, anti-(im)migrant discourse denies race as a factor in (im)migrants’ exclusion from the US nation-state. Perhaps anticipating charges of racism frequently directed at anti-(im)migrant discourse, *Border War* insists border security and the exclusion of undocumented (im)migrants from the US receives multicultural support. The film supports this stance by presenting closed-border advocates as a racially diverse group of citizen activists committed to protecting the economic, political, and cultural wellness of their
local communities. According to this logic, if people of color, particularly persons of Mexican
descent, call for increased security at the US-Mexico border and for the expulsion of “illegal”
(im)migrants, then this stance must not be racist. Further, featuring the stories of a Mexican
American border defense advocate and Border Patrol agent allows filmmakers to demonstrate
US and Mexican citizens are fundamentally separate and at odds. As I will show, the filmmakers
underscore Mexican Americans’ citizenship status and commitment to their local communities
(and US nation-state) in order to demonstrate the exclusion of Mexican (im)migrants as a nation-
based need and justified by activists’ committed to fairness and legality. Yet, I argue race/racism
is embedded in and shapes exclusionary discourse about the local, even as the documentary
presents a racially diverse local population opposing undocumented (im)migration in an effort to
protect their communities.

The filmmakers use Lupe Moreno as head of Latinos for Immigration Reform to show
exclusionary border rhetoric and demands for (im)migration reform and restriction are not race-
based, as there are people of color (namely Latinos) who stand with anti-(im)migration
groups. Moreno positions herself as a patriot protecting the needs and rights of US citizens,
which reflects her sense of inclusion and participation in the US citizenry. By featuring Mexican
Americans who vigorously oppose the entry of undocumented Mexicans, the filmmakers support
claims of exclusion are based upon nation and population control (and not racism). Moreno
passionately proclaims, “We’re in a battle for this nation.” This statement asserts Moreno’s place
in the national imaginary; further, her use of war terminology presumes a nation-based struggle,
rather than one based in racial bias. A nation-based struggle demands national insiders display
“unquestioned patriotism” because a “lack of support for the war effort is treasonous” (Lakoff).

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134 This logic relies upon the acceptance of Latinos as not racially white.
Opposition to undocumented (im)migration rooted in defense of the nation-state and its values and histories directs attention away from the role of race, minimizing how self-identified Mexican American or Latina/o interviewees merely reiterate the same racist arguments as many white, US Americans. This turn demonstrates the intersections of racism and internalized oppression, rather than serving as evidence of a post-racial mentality.

*Border War* also features a Mexican American US Border Patrol agent as evidence that racial discrimination does not drive the exclusion of undocumented (im)migrants entering the US via the nation’s southern border. The documentary captures the daily activities of Agent Jose Luis Maheda, who heads the Nogales-area undercover disrupt team. Maheda’s first appearance shows him on patrol, with text on screen declaring his “parents emigrated legally from Mexico.” The film once again introduces Latinos in ways that confirm US nationality, citizenship, and allegiance (whites are not similarly represented alongside their nationality or allegiances). Through this statement, the film also distinguishes Maheda and his family from the undocumented (im)migrants he pursues and detains, many of whom arrive from Mexico. Maheda replicates this logic by stating, “There is a process for legal immigration into the United States. My family did it…I know it takes some time. Breaking the US laws is not something that I condone. Obviously I’m in law enforcement. Obviously I’m here to stop illegal immigration into the United States. Our stance is there’s a legal way of doing it.” The emphasis on legality again affirms exclusion and deportation measures stem from a commitment to protecting the nation.

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135 Commenting on how “multiculturalism” is often cited as proof that movements, policies, or ideologies are not racist, Jodi Melamed writes, “Alberto Gonzalez, the Mexican American former U.S. attorney general, served as a kind of signpost for multiculturalism by virtue of his racialized body and his Mexican descent. As such an embodiment, he obscured the otherwise clearly racist implications of raids, assaults, and special registrations inflicted on Mexican and Arab immigrants in the post-9/11 period” (154).

136 This group is an anti-smuggling, immediate strike team that conducts short term investigations with long-term effects in a community.
from foreigners, rather than racial others (as the calls for restriction, in this case, come from a US citizen). As a US citizen, Maheda emphasizes that national identity and expressions of loyalty and patriotism trump potential ethnic or historical affinity with Mexican (im)migrants. Nation-based exclusion prevails, while charges of racism are summarily dismissed.¹³⁷

A long history exists of Mexican Americans distinguishing themselves from Mexican nationals and recently arrived Mexican (im)migrants. Historian David Gutiérrez indicates that Mexican (im)migrants’ presence in US communities “has forced Mexican Americans to come to daily decisions about who they are—politically, socially, and culturally—in comparison to more recent immigrants from Mexico” (6). These decisions may be partially informed by white, US Americans’ characterizations of Mexicans as peons who are illiterate, ignorant, and to blame for lowering wages and conditions of US laborers (Box 375). As part of a political and protectionist strategy, groups such as the League of United Latin-American Citizens sought to distinguish themselves from Mexicans and their customs in order to reduce racial prejudice directed at Mexican Americans (386). While Border Patrol Agent Maheda or Lupe Moreno of Latinos for Immigration Reform may not identify their participation in anti-(im)migrant work as an effort to reduce racial prejudice directed at them as Mexican Americans, their efforts to distance themselves from Mexican nationals suggests an understanding of the racialization and Othering experienced by those perceived as brown-skinned foreigners.

Border War features people of color, particularly US Americans of Mexican descent, supporting closed-border policies on the basis of protecting the US and fellow citizens. The

¹³⁷ Eduardo Bonilla-Silva’s work on color-blind racism helps illuminate how the filmmakers and several interviewees employ color-blind scripts to shift the exclusion discourse from race to nation. Highlighting Mexican Americans US citizenship, the anti-(im)migrant perspective resists charges of racism by underscoring all authorized persons are welcome in the US.
majority of people of color featured in the documentary offer anti-(im)migrant perspectives, which paves the way for white US Americans to call for regulation, exclusion, and restriction without feeling susceptible to charges of racism (after all, they have non-white allies). Commenting on racism originating from various racial and ethnic groups, sociologist Robert Lee Maril writes, “In the borderlands there is not only the expected racism of Anglos toward Mexicans, but also Latinos toward Mexicans. Many justify their discrimination based upon pride in their American citizenship by birth, their unique culture, and their history; Anglos join in this discrimination against Mexicans” (66). In an effort to combat and challenge charges that racism motivates restriction-based border policies, particularly when espoused by white US Americans, the filmmakers feature people of color articulating exclusionary ideologies. The filmmakers use claims of racial diversity and the defense of local culture to shield the documentary and anti-(im)migrant voices from charges of racism fueling the closed-border, anti-(im)migrant stance.

Rejecting Outcast US Americans’ Localism

*Border War* features one US citizen who rejects localism and treats undocumented (im)migration to the US as a transnational issue. Enrique Morones, a US-born citizen who holds dual citizenship with Mexico, calls for the protection of all human beings, regardless of national identity or alliance with local US communities. He calls on the US to “welcome people,” particularly since “we have such a big economy and use so many natural resources.” Morones sees the US as an economic powerhouse capable of sharing resources and offering security to (im)migrants. He roots his call for action in the belief the US can and should do better in its treatment of (im)migrants; however, the filmmakers consistently depict his principles as an
outsider’s perspective on the US-Mexico border.138

The film emphasizes Morones’ work with Mexican (im)migrants and his pride in his Mexican heritage as a means of situating him as an outsider and questionable patriot. Viewers’ introduction to Morones differs from Moreno or Maheda who proclaim their singular allegiance to the US. In contrast, Morones states, “People ask me what I am. I proudly tell them what I am. I’m Mexican…I happen to be born in San Diego. That wasn’t my choice. If I would have had my choice, I’d love to have been born in Tijuana or in Mexico City.” As a brown-skinned, bilingual (Spanish and English) man who declares he would have preferred to be born in Mexico, Morones’ US and local insider status is called into question.

*Border War* treats Morones’ pro-(im)migrant ideologies as a threat to the established US order. He runs an activist group called Border Angels, which recognizes the human needs and suffering of (im)migrants and responds by distributing water and supplies to (im)migrants in the desert. Commenting on his advocacy work, Morones indicates he has always “identified with being Mexican” but has a “love for both countries” and has a “passion for [his] roots and working with the community.” In contrast to other interviewees, he refuses to subscribe to an understanding of community bound by the nation-state or treat (im)migrants as a threat to the economic security of US Americans. Morones advocates for human security, which “entails freedom from physical violence, poverty, hunger, and disease, places individuals and their moral worth at the center of its investigation” (Monshipouri 2). Although Morones articulates his position clearly and forcefully, his patriotism and loyalty to the US are treated with skepticism

138 Because *Border War* is a documentary and the genre demands some semblance of objectivity, the film also includes a pro-(im)migrant perspective.
by the filmmakers. Morones is shown speaking and singing in Spanish with border activists (the film does not offer a translation) and meeting with (im)migrants in Mexico about safe-crossing strategies; these frames align him more closely with Mexico and undocumented (im)migrants than the US and its citizens. In scrutinizing and questioning Morones’ national and local loyalties, the filmmakers give viewers reason to distrust Morones and his views and reject both as an example of US localism.

In geographic terms, Enrique Morones can be read as a local in the US border region. However, the documentary frames his rejection of exclusionary economic and nationalist ideologies as a rejection of local values, which are understood as protectionist, rather than exclusionary, by other interviewees. *Border War* instead validates the anti-(im)migrant narratives as expressions of positive US localism, because interviewees demand the protection of local (US) community members’ economic, familial, and national interests. This view of “local” mutes the role of race in (im)migration discourse. Unexpectedly, this tactic also appears in pro-(im)migrant cultural texts, including *The Other Side of Immigration*, which also negates the role of race in US (im)migration discourse.

*The Other Side of Immigration: Mexican Communities and Undocumented (Im)migration*

Roy Germano’s documentary, *The Other Side of Immigration* (2009), shows transnational political, social, and economic forces motivating Mexican (im)migrants’ undocumented entry into the US. In contrast to *Border War*, which depicts (im)migration as threatening to US borderlands inhabitants and their local communities, Germano portrays undocumented (im)migration—spurred by imbalanced (trans)national political and corrupt economic actions—

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139 Legal scholar Marjorie Cohn writes about how the FBI saw Martin Luther King as a threat to the established order of the US, and thus worked to disrupt his work as an activist and civil rights leader (72). Morones, like Dr. King, resists and the established US racial order, and the film undermines his credibility.
as threatening to local Mexican communities and cultures. Spotlighting small communities in the Mexican state of Michoacán “where up to half of the population has left to work in the US,” Germano, a political scientist and immigration expert, conducts interviews with former (im)migrants and their family members, local and federal political leaders, and residents. The interviews introduce viewers to the first-hand costs of transnational (im)migration for small Mexican communities and their residents, including separating families for long stretches of time and (im)migrants experiencing discrimination and violence in the US. By depicting undocumented (im)migration to the US as a transnational issue deeply affecting Mexican communities, *The Other Side* challenges the unilateral agenda of US laws such as SB 1070 that vilify (im)migrants and treat the US nation-state as the innocent victim.

Even as *The Other Side* advances a pro-(im)migrant perspective, the documentary strategically fails to evaluate how racial logic shapes (im)migrants’ experiences in the US. As I will show, the film briefly and tentatively acknowledges the race-based discrimination Mexican (im)migrants face in the US, but does not centralize this issue. Rather than focusing on (im)migrants’ difficulties crossing the border and living in the US, which would engage in politically charged debates concerning border regulation and racial profiling, *The Other Side* explains why (im)migrants leave their communities. Focusing on (im)migrants’ desire to support their families, contribute to local economy, and build local infrastructure encourages US audiences to relate to (im)migrants and their struggles and goals. In this way, *The Other Side* capitulates to the dominant discourse of localism by minimizing the role of race.

Critics have given far less attention to *The Other Side of Immigration* than other cultural

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140 At the beginning of the film, text appears on screen noting that “The following is based on a survey of over 700 families in rural Mexico.”
A textbook, The Other Side, is discussed. An educational documentary, The Other Side “screened at dozens of universities, film festivals, high schools, public libraries, health clinics, conferences, and public institutions,” but it aired less widely than related topical films such as Border War. (“About”). International Studies scholar Alexandra Délano reviewed the film for the Latino Studies journal. Délano spends most of the review describing, rather than evaluating, the documentary. She indicates the film’s focus on economic issues “might appear obvious to experts on the topic.” (271), but praises Germano’s decision to feature “the voice of migrants and their families,” as this approach “offers a fresh perspective and valuable insights” (271). Ultimately, Délano concludes The Other Side shows “the need for greater awareness of the social, political and economic factors that drive migration, the lives at stake and the need for urgent, creative, comprehensive and humane solutions” (272). I agree with Délano’s review of the film’s intentions, and extend her argument by considering the documentary’s treatment of “social, political and economic factors that drive migration” as well as (im)migrants’ commitment to protecting and defending their local communities and culture.

In my analysis of The Other Side, I show how Germano and the interviewees understand (im)migration as the necessary result of an unfair transnational economic system and as a step in protecting and defending their local communities. I begin by illustrating how the film frames undocumented (im)migration as a transnational issue produced by US and Mexican federal policies, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and border defense strategies. These (trans)national policies and legislative actions wreak havoc on communities in rural Mexico, specifically within the state of Michoacán, driving down the price of goods and

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141 Most reviews of the film appear on Amazon.com. Even a link on the documentary’s official site directs audiences to “Read reviews on Amazon.”
forcing workers to (im)migrate to the US. Economic devastation attributed to federal (in)action requires local actors to intervene/(im)migrate in order to revive their communities and provide for their families. *The Other Side* shows how (im)migration threatens local communities in Michoacán. Residents convey that values including commitment to family, desire to build community, and cultural pride constitute the local. I argue the documentary functions as a corrective to *Border War* by highlighting how transitional political and economic forces place the local identity and aesthetic at risk for Mexicans. Further, *The Other Side* complicates binary treatments of (im)migration as good or bad by noting mass (im)migration exacerbates the loss of local identity, yet (im)migrants leave their hometowns in an effort to protect and support the local long-term. Finally, I show how *The Other Side* tentatively suggests race-based ideologies shape US communities and (im)migrants’ exclusion from them (treated as unwelcome and inferior), but Germano neglects this issue. Instead, his critique of the US and its treatment of (im)migrants centers on the border fence, described as ineffective, wasteful, and one-sided. By turning to a cost-value analysis of transnational (im)migration, the documentary departs from its focus on the local and loses sight of the role of race and racism in (im)migration discourse.

*(Trans)national Issue with Local Consequences*

*The Other Side* details the significance of public policy and ineffective or corrupt political governance, thus offering a more panoramic view of the economic and political forces governing undocumented (im)migration. In her work on transnational Mexican (im)migration, Deborah A. Boehm emphasizes the importance of contextualizing migration within the larger political milieu, arguing “A focus on migrants as individual actors, with little discussion of the context within which they move and act” obscures the role of “the U.S. state and its agents, and particularly how state policies and practices play out in the lives” of undocumented (im)migrants.
The film’s focus on the implications of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and regulatory border policies alongside the (in)action of Mexican federal leaders exposes the economic impact of state policies that underwrite undocumented (im)migration to the US. When examining (im)migration as a (trans)national issue, *The Other Side* frames (im)migration as an economic issue conditioned by politics; yet, by also focusing on the local level (which I take up in the next section), viewers see how communal identities and commitments motivate many people to (im)migrate in order to support their families and rebuild their communities.

Establishing transnational polices as a force behind undocumented (im)migration, Germano shows the gulf between how the US and Mexico profited from NAFTA and the consequences of this disparity on Mexican “local” communities. The film highlights Mexican growers’ and ranchers’ struggle to compete with the technologically sophisticated and government subsidized US agricultural system. Interviewees argue NAFTA makes market competition impossible for Mexican farmers. Oswaldo Rodríguez Gutiérrez of the Mexican Ministry of Rural Development claims no quality difference exists between crops produced in the US versus crops grown in Mexico; rather, “the issue is what it costs to grow…costs of production in Mexico are much higher. Apart from being very efficient, North American farmers receive significant subsidies—subsidies that the Mexican government is unable to provide.” The lower production costs in the US combined with the Mexican government’s inability to subsidize farmers contributes to a weak local market, underlining the connection between transnational and local. Echoing this point, Juan, a former farmer and (im)migrant, says, “In the past, I’d grow a

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142 The 1994 NAFTA agreement—intent on eliminating barriers to trade between the US, Canada, and Mexico—contributed to the skyrocketing of agricultural production costs in Mexico and plummeting profits, thus motivating new rounds of (im)migration to the US.
half-acre of corn on that land near the house. Then I’d take it into town to sell carrying it down the mountain on my back…But now I buy corn. It’s not worth it to grow corn anymore because…there’s so much cheaper corn coming in.”

Growers’ inability to compete in the marketplace leads many to uproot in search of new possibilities, as local mayoral candidate Maria Elena Macías Sánchez contends. Commenting on the impact of non-competitive goods, she asserts, “Now it’s not worth it to farm because the price of corn is $120 per ton, which is nothing. And all the work and effort you don’t make back your expenses when you sell the crops. So it makes more sense just to sell your land.” Germano and interviewees depict the devastated Mexican local economies and lack of labor opportunities resulting from transnational policies such as NAFTA as forces that drive (im)migrants to the US seeking economic refuge.

The film underscores how transnational policies can compromise the economic security of local communities.

The film shows how transnational policies and US subsidies drive down the market value of Mexican goods, while arguing the issue is exacerbated by a corrupt Mexican political system. Rafael, a corn farmer indicates, “We don’t have a government. The government doesn’t look out for us. It doesn’t matter who’s in power.” Former (im)migrant Agustín Cisnero Rincón adds, “the Mexican government is among the most corrupt that there are. At every level.” While the federal government receives much of the blame, state and local officials are not immune to

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143 The trials Juan faces in producing and selling crops are also conveyed by pig farmers and those growing beans and strawberries. Javier, a former (im)migrant, adds, “Grains like corn, beans, and wheat have also been affected by market competition.”

144 Yet, when growers and ranchers sell their lands and no longer sell goods in the marketplace, they inadvertently provide more room for the sale of imported crops and increase the dependency of Mexican communities on these imports.

145 Kathleen C. Schwartzman complicates this point in her study on rural Mexican (im)migration patterns to the US post-NAFTA. She writes, “Mexicans are fleeing livelihoods devastated by the shift from a regulated and protected system of rural production to one open on the global market” (137). Yet, she also argues NAFTA “cannot be held solely responsible for Mexico’s rural collapse” and points to other national and global events influencing the economic downturn, including Mexico’s 1982 debt renegotiations (137).
charges of malfeasance. Mayoral candidate Artemio Díaz Figueroa states, “Our officials in the city don’t tell about all of the programs that we have in the government,” and suggests the few who benefit do so because of their connections with government insiders. Mayoral candidate Sánchez confirms, “There are lots of government programs, but unfortunately if you’re not on the mayor’s good side, he doesn’t give you access to them.” As a result of federal government officials’ unwillingness to publicize programs widely and evenly, locals “don’t really depend on the government.” According to returning (im)migrant Alejo Froylán Guzmán, “we depend more on our brothers in the US. So we aren’t concerned with what the government does or doesn’t do.” Noting the corruption within the Mexican government and limited labor opportunities in Mexico, many (im)migrants determine they must intervene/(im)migrate in order to revive their communities and provide for their families. (Im)migrants leave Mexico, with many hoping to draw upon relationships with acquaintances or “brothers” in the US, which indicates local attachments span across national boundaries.

*The Other Side* presents Mexican undocumented (im)migration to the US as a transnational issue shaped by US and Mexican policies. As sociologist Robert Lee Maril argues, “Arbitrary but binding decisions made in the two national capitals have the ability to directly form, shape, and change the lives of residents on both sides of the border—and, more tellingly but in ways less understood, the lives of those far from these borderlands” (5). Maril’s argument underscores how (trans)national political actions can shape local communities in unsuspecting and unrealized ways. Through the documentary, Germano and Mexican interviewees stress undocumented (im)migration to the US significantly affects the Mexican countryside or rural areas. In a voiceover, one woman notes, “Some professionals migrate. But people from the countryside migrate the most…the rural poor.” The lack of economic opportunities and inability
to support one’s family, particularly for Mexico’s rural poor, intensify a failing economy and contribute to the need to seek work elsewhere. While a transnational evaluation of undocumented (im)migration sheds light on economic and political factors motivating (im)migration, homing in on local communities and their needs reveals (im)migrants’ decision to leave Mexico is rooted in an effort to protect the identity and aesthetic of their local communities, particularly their families.

Protecting and Supporting the Local Character

The documentary portrays undocumented Mexican (im)migration to the US as a desperate yet necessary measure to protect local communities, which transnational policies and corrupt federal leaders threaten. Germano shows interviewees grappling with the immediate risks and consequences of undocumented (im)migration versus the potential long-term economic security for themselves, their families, and their communities. The film emphasizes (im)migration to the US derives, in part, from (im)migrants’ commitment to family, desire to build community, and cultural pride, all of which compromise a local identity they seek to protect and support. Through this framework, *The Other Side* dismisses popular conceptions of the US and its citizens as the primary victims by showing how undocumented (im)migration constitutes a threat for individual (im)migrants, their families, and local communities within Mexico.

Much like the US American interviewees in *Border War*, the interviewees in *The Other Side* focus on the effects of undocumented (im)migration on local communities. While *Border War* treats undocumented (im)migrants as a threat to US borderlands communities, *The Other Side* names the lack of labor opportunities in rural Mexico as a threat to (im)migrants and their local communities. Challenging perceptions of undocumented (im)migration as an economic
issue for just the US, Agustín Cisnero Rincón, a former (im)migrant exclaims, “People don’t migrate just for the pleasure of working somewhere else!”; they (im)migrate in order to find employment. While a devastated economy, loss of jobs, and inability to compete in the market motivate (im)migration, a desire to rectify these issues compels their return (along with earnings from the US), demonstrating how economic security is one aspect of local identity that has been compromised and that (im)migrants seek to reclaim.\footnote{The film does not provide any statistics on (im)migrants leaving for the US or returning to Michoacán. Based upon the number of interviewees described as “former migrants,” the film leads viewers to believe that a significant portion of the population has previously (im)migrated but also returned. However, several interviewees indicate many (im)migrants never return or return after years away, which particularly “affects the kids and the women…the kids grow up without their dads.”}

Former (im)migrant Alejo Guzmán addresses the meso-level effects of undocumented (im)migration, pointing to how (im)migration helps build local communities. Guzmán argues his entire community benefits from (im)migrants’ work in the US. He notes, “Our urban infrastructure, our paved streets, the condition of the local school, in some sense, everything is built with money from the US. Most of the kids who go to school, their dads, uncles, or brothers are in the US, they are supporting their kids so they can study here.” Further, he argues even families who do not depend on money from the US indirectly benefit and even depend upon (im)migrants’ contributions to maintain their current quality of life. Guzmán reasons, “the money that migrants send back stimulates the local economy….If there wasn’t money coming in from the US, the vendors wouldn’t be able to sell their products. They can set up their booths because money from the US generates spending. We depend on this. The body shops, the restaurants that exist, we wouldn’t have them if there wasn’t money coming” from (im)migrants’ remittances. The economic impact of remittances reveals how (im)migration to the US contributes to a stronger local economy; this narrative counters prevailing US logic constructing (im)migrants as
an economic threat (particularly to local communities and identities). Yet, while the community at large may benefit from undocumented (im)migration, it still takes a toll on individuals and families.

A commitment to one’s family and desire to protect and provide for them also drives (im)migration to the US. Although family members depart for the US for months and years at a time, many interviewees understand (im)migration as a necessary struggle leading to significant rewards. Carolina Coria Rueda, the wife of a returned (im)migrant, notes her husband has (im)migrated to the US because the couple “wanted to save, we wanted to have something. He was up there doing his part.” Through a series of interviews of community members who remain in Mexico, many of whom are wives and/or mothers of (im)migrants, the documentary shows how (im)migration taxes families and highlights the toll of male (im)migrants’ absence from the community. Nacho, who previously (im)migrated to the US, states, “There are towns with only women and children and their husbands and dads are working in the US.” He suggests this separation challenges children, especially young boys, who lack male role models. Adding to this perspective, Rueda indicates, “Families are divided when they work in the US—divided out of necessity.” Rueda knows this firsthand, as six of her children “are working and struggling [in the US], but they aren’t criminals. They’re up there for a brighter future, but not to stay forever.” Her comments underscore the difficulties of separation and that undocumented (im)migrants work to improve individual and familial long-term circumstances. Rueda also acknowledges her family’s survival depends upon her husband’s and children’s (im)migration to the US. She states, “Everything we have to keep the kids healthy, to pay for school, shoes, whatever they need, the basic necessities” is due to (im)migration, and “Thanks to God, thanks to their efforts, my husband and children have risked their lives, we have these four walls.” This reflection shows
how families accept that (im)migrants leave their hometowns in an effort to protect and support the local long-term. This version of localism complicates dominant US narratives depicting undocumented (im)migration as a threat to US families who, according to J.D. Hayworth, are just trying to live their lives, do their jobs, and educate their children (Border War). Instead, Germano shows how (im)migration also protects familial ties, bolsters opportunities, and strengthens the family unit.

_The Other Side_ challenges dominant and ethnocentric US narratives that treat undocumented (im)migration as a problem unilaterally affecting the US. Germano and interviewees discuss how (im)migration causes (im)migrants, their families, and communities to suffer in the short-term. However, they also suggest (im)migration to the US presents local communities with an opportunity to combat the suffering and inequality caused by transnational political agreements and corrupt Mexican legislators and to protect the health and wellness of local families and communities long-term. As conveyed by the interviewees, local concerns and values worth protecting and enhancing include the nuclear family, economic stability, and cultural pride. Each of these aspects defining localism resemble values and identities that US citizens (featured in Border War) also conceive as constituting the local and worthy of protection. In each case, local is understood as a multitude of values and characteristics, particularly a commitment to community security. The similarities between US and Mexican localisms reveal the importance of gender roles (conveyed through an emphasis on the nuclear family), financial stability, and community pride to local identity, regardless of national identity. Both forms of localism also reveal that locals ignore or obscure the significance of racial identities in border discourses, thus suggesting (im)migration and localism are race-neutral phenomenon.
Minimizing Race, Again

The gap between understanding (im)migration as a threat to US communities and a potential boon to Mexican communities reveals different conceptions of who and what constitutes a threat. I argue part of this gap derives from the role of race in exclusionary US border politics. As my analysis of Border War showed, race plays a role in US localism and the exclusion of (im)migrants as outsiders, even though the documentary suggests the treatment of (im)migrants as a threat and their subsequent marginalization is not race-based. Rather than engaging in a heated political debate about the role of race in US (im)migration discourse (particularly the racial scripts designating undocumented (im)migrants as criminal and threatening), The Other Side also downplays the role of race. This is particularly evident in the film’s final section when Germano calls for a transnational political and economic solution to (im)migration, thus constructing (im)migration as primarily an economic issue. By turning to a cost-value analysis of transnational (im)migration and framing solutions in economic terms, the film loses sight of the complexity of local identity (not just about economics) and (im)migrants’ motivation for protecting and rebuilding community.

As in Border War, interviewees in The Other Side never mention racial identity as part of what shapes their respective local identities and communities. The Other Side only briefly features returned (im)migrants discussing their experiences crossing the US-Mexico border and residing in the US. They lament, “there are vigilantes killing people who cross the border” and the undocumented are treated “like criminals in the US.” The interviewees do not elaborate on either point; yet, these sentiments tentatively acknowledge the discrimination and violence (im)migrants encounter in the US, as (im)migrants point to US racial scripts marking them as criminals. However, Germano drops the issue quickly, failing to address racial scripts, violence
targeting (im)migrants, or the criminalization of their presence in the US. Instead, his critique of the US and its treatment of (im)migrants centers on the border fence, described as ineffective, wasteful, and one-sided. But, as Historian Cynthia R. Greenlee warns, “Fights over space…are more often contests about privilege: Who gets to be in this space? Who dictates the use and control of the space? And what happens when people who aren’t like some pre-determined and overdetermined notion of what constitutes ‘us’ gets in our space?” (“Prospect”). Rather than showing how the fence signifies US fears of the Mexican “Other” getting into “our space,” which would allow for an analysis of US racial hierarchies and logic, Germano treats the border fence as an economically irresponsible project that failed on a practical level.

The documentary calls for a partnership between the United States and Mexico in addressing the economic concerns motivating Mexicans’ (im)migration to the US. This call holds the US accountable for its role in a devastated rural Mexican economy and indicates the US stands to benefit from transnational partnerships addressing the root causes of (im)migration. Otherwise, as a Mexican government official argues, “The alternative is that the US spends a lot of money deporting people.” This point may appeal to the economic interests of US Americans, but it reinforces dominant US economic narratives that fixate on cost of (im)migrants’ presence in the US. Yet, the film endorses this perspective, depicting the fence as an untenable economic decision and a barrier to productive transnational solutions to undocumented (im)migration. Francisco Melecio of the Mexican Ministry of Agricultural Reform questions US strategies that rely upon restriction and exclusion rather than building relationships and infrastructure:

Why spend money on a border fence when we could invest in highways, factories, and greenhouses? How many greenhouses could we build for the cost of that wall? If we invest in Mexico, people won’t want to leave….The US has a responsibility…this
problem should be shared. Just like drug trafficking and organized crime. They are serious problems, but if we don’t work together, it will be difficult to solve them.

*The Other Side* ultimately highlights and endorses a transnational commitment to addressing undocumented (im)migration. However, transnational political discourse treats (im)migration as a political and economic issue, which assess (im)migration and the viability of solutions through a cost-value lens. This framework privileges economic and political solutions and the perspectives of public officials, thus silencing “localized rhetoric” and ignoring the complex and interlocking realities motivating undocumented.

*The Other Side* features local actors discussing the short- and long-term effects of undocumented (im)migration on local populations. The documentary underscores that (im)migrants leave their homes in order to support their families, the economy, and to rebuild their communities, all of which intersect to produce a local identity worthy of protection. Yet, the film’s closing emphasis on transnational solutions and construction of (im)migration as a primarily economic issue decenters local communities and voices in Mexico. By departing from the local framework, Germano fails to acknowledge or evaluate the role of race and US racial logic in shaping undocumented (im)migration as well as the lives, relationships, or experiences of local actors.

**Conclusion**

Within the political and cultural texts featured in this chapter, both anti- and pro-(im)migrant camps acknowledge undocumented (im)migration as a transnational issue, often blaming the US and/or Mexican governments for insufficiently protecting their respective citizens. For instance, SB 1070’s architects and supporters argue (im)migration affects US citizens locally (i.e. communities, neighborhoods, families) and therefore necessitates local-level
interventions. The documentaries, which were both released prior to 1070’s passage, also pinpoint how (im)migration affects people at the local level, with Border War focusing on US citizens and The Other Side of Immigration concentrating on Mexican citizens. Through this chapter, I have shown that US legal and cultural texts—such as SB 1070, Border War, and The Other Side of Immigration—utilize the equally nebulous and complex concept of “local” to suppress the role of race in contemporary (im)migration discourse.

I paired Border War and The Other Side to demonstrate how pro- and anti-(im)migrant discourses treat (im)migration as a threat to the character and aesthetic of local communities. Border War suggests the exclusion of undocumented (im)migrants stems from a desire to protect local US populations and their economic, political, and social identities. Reframing exclusion as a defense of local identities and values shifts the discourse from a race-based issue to an emphasis on local actors, encouraging viewers to disassociate anti-(im)migrant attitudes and policies from racism. Meanwhile, The Other Side also downplays the role of race and racism in US border defense discourse, and instead shows how the decision to (im)migrate to the US should be read as a defense of local values and identities. The documentary explains that (im)migrants leave their communities in an effort to support their families, contribute to local economy, and build local infrastructure. Whether espousing pro- or anti-(im)migrant ideologies, the legal and cultural texts featured in this chapter reveal how treating undocumented (im)migration as a local threat obscures the role of race and racism in (im)migration-themed discourse by suggesting the borders dividing US and Mexican citizens involve gender roles and family dynamics, economic contribution to the community, and citizenship.
CONCLUSION

A Coca-Cola commercial titled “It’s Beautiful” aired during the 2014 NFL Super Bowl. The minute-long advertisement displayed a diversity of American landscapes and people who live, work, and play in the US. Recognizable backdrops such as the Grand Canyon or New York City intermix with culturally familiar images of people watching movies, dancing on city streets, swimming, and roller skating, or just drinking a bottle of Coke. The commercial—part of Coke’s longstanding advertising approach—recognizes and seems to celebrate the racial, cultural, religious, gender, and sexual diversity of the nation’s populace. Images of black teens dancing, a white child camping, Muslim women buying food from a street vendor, and a gay couple skating with their daughter at a roller rink all intertwine to reveal the heterogeneity of the US population. Crystalizing the celebratory and patriotic tone of the commercial, “America the Beautiful” plays in the background. The song begins in English, with segments sung in Spanish, Hindi, Keres, Tagalog, Senegalese-French, and Hebrew. The President of Coca-Cola North America stated the commercial celebrates “the diversity that makes this country great and the fact that anyone can thrive here and be happy. We hope the ad gets people talking and thinking about what it means to be proud to be American” (“It’s Beautiful”). Immediately after the commercial aired, US Americans certainly began “talking and thinking about what it means to be…American.” Viewers posted their comments and reactions to social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. While some praised the company and the advertisement, others revealed homophobic, racist, and xenophobic attitudes as they condemned Coke and disparaged those perceived as gay, foreign, or outside the nation’s imagined community.

147 Coke’s 1971 ad “I’d Like to Buy the World a Coke” displayed a diverse populace (of supposed Coke consumers).
148 Benedict Anderson describes the nation as an imagined community, noting that “regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail…the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (7).
I conclude with a synopsis of Coke’s “It’s Beautiful” advertisement because the commercial and ensuing popular protests (presented below) illustrate the continued relevance of many of the questions and concerns addressed in this project. Throughout this project, I have demonstrated how US cultural and legislative texts shape the discourse on undocumented (im)migrants and whether they fit socially constructed definitions of what it means to “be American” or part of the US national imaginary. I have argued that (im)migrant-themed cultural texts, alongside legal policies, participate in racial formation projects that use racial logic to implicitly mark (im)migrants as outsiders while employing ideologies rooted in gender, economics, nationality, and localism to rationalize (im)migrants’ exclusion or inclusion from the US nation-state.

Much like the cultural and legal texts featured in the previous chapters, “It’s Beautiful” presents a veneer inconsistent with the embedded message. The commercial makes claims about what it means to be American, outwardly signaling the importance of national allegiance, consumerism, and cisgender identity as conveyed by a racially, religiously, sexually, and culturally diverse populace. Further, “It’s Beautiful” outwardly rejects dominant and exclusionary racial scripts that mark people of color or those speaking a language other than English as outside the national imaginary. Yet, the commercial also subscribes to an assimilationist racial logic that suggests being read as a cultural insider depends upon abiding by and subscribing to “normative” ideas (coded as Western, capitalist, cisgender, and patriotic) of what constitutes a US American. A close reading of “It’s Beautiful” reveals how covert racial logic continues to permeate US cultural texts, including some products that appear affirming and inclusive.

149 “American” is used as a stand-in for US within the commercial and Coke’s official statements regarding the ad.
Coke outwardly embraces a racially diverse populace, yet the images show how cultural texts employ exclusionary gender, class, and nation-based ideologies to manage and police the US populace in a “race-neutral” fashion. For example, “It’s Beautiful” opens with an image of a rugged and masculine man on horseback; portrait-style shots of women focused on their made-up faces and stylized hair appear throughout. In chapter one, I showed how dominant US cultural ideologies use traditional gender and sex-based norms to include or exclude (im)migrants from the US nation-state. The cisgender and traditionally masculine and feminine gender presentations infusing the commercial’s imagery underscore the power of sex- and gender-based messages in determining who belongs (or does not) in the US imaginary. The commercial also reveals the importance of consumerism, particularly the purchase and consumption of Coke, as a critical component of being read and accepted as US American. As I argued in chapter two, active participation in the US marketplace bolsters the ability to dress, act, and be read as an insider. Finally, with “America the Beautiful” sung in seven different languages, Coke shows various expressions of US nationalism and patriotism but also underscores being read and accepted as US American requires an outward display of one’s allegiance to the nation-state. Thus, while Coke celebrates a racially diverse US community (and clientele), the imagery emphasizes that successfully performing as a cultural insider depends upon subscribing to “normative” gender, class, and nationalist ideologies. The inclusive imagery combined with a “just like us” mentality underscores the overlap and gray areas linking “pro” and “anti” viewpoints on subjects ranging from (im)migration to a racially, sexually, and linguistically diverse populace, showing how surface-level and underlying messages may clash.

While Coke placed a spotlight on US heterogeneity, the racial and linguistic diversity of the US populace dragged the commercial into a larger cultural conversation about what
phenotypic and cultural characteristics constitute “American.” As demonstrated by public feedback and resistance via social media, popular responses to “It’s Beautiful” draw upon dominant racial scripts defining US Americans as white, the US as an English-only nation, and people of color as foreigners, terrorists, and “illegals.” These public statements show overtly racist discourse resurfacing in contemporary US America, underscoring how dominant racial logic has existed all along, even if muted or suppressed in (im)migration-themed US cultural and legal texts.

Some social media users took exception with “America the Beautiful” being sung in a language other than English. One user writes, “WTF? @CocaCola has America the Beautiful being sung in different languages in a #Super Bowl commercial? We speak ENGLISH here, IDIOTS” (Rainforth). The exclusionary “English-only” policy intersects with targeted racist language in other tweets to stress that US American means English-speaking and white, as exemplified by: “F you coke the national anthem wasn’t made for your gook and Mexican talking. STFU!!! Speak English” (Etchelecu). This respondent has not only misidentified “America the Beautiful” as the national anthem, but continued on a tirade employing racist rhetoric that signals people of Asian and Mexican descent are excluded from the national imaginary and designated as outsiders and foreigners who have no claims on “American” culture or identity. These messages highlight the interconnectedness of racism and xenophobia in policing and excluding people perceived as racial, religious, and cultural outsiders from the national community.150

150 Another Twitter user depicts US American as an exclusionary category that exists in opposition to terrorists: “Nice to see that coke likes to sing an AMERICAN song in the terrorist’s language. Way to go coke. You can leave America” (Wyckoff). This remark frames non-English speakers as unwelcome outsiders and as terrorists. Although the user fails to specify who he regards as a terrorist, dominant cultural and media representations of Muslims, Arabs, and Middle Easterners as terrorists (and as one in the same) seem to fuel this response.
The “English-only” thread intersects with more politically-minded discourse to shift the conversation to the US-Mexico border. In an effort to politicize the commercial and emphasize the notion of US American as white (and undocumented people as not white), some respondents characterized the ad as a ploy for amnesty for “illegals.” Messages in this vein include: “That Coca Cola commercial was just propaganda to push amnesty for illegals. Just letting you all know” (Vampola). Another user suggests “Coca Cola is the official soft drink of illegals crossing the border” (Starnes). Both of these responses rely upon the pejorative term “illegals” in reference to undocumented persons. Though neither mentions Mexicans nor Latinos specifically, the term “illegal” has been popularly applied to Latinos who cross the US-Mexico border without documentation. Commenting on the linguistic move of conflating “illegals” and Mexicans, rhetorician Josue David Cisneros writes,

> Because of the prevalence of Mexican immigration in the United States, there is a continual double conflation in this discourse: a conflation of the Mexican and Latina/o body, so that all Latina/o-looking (i.e., brown) people are considered Mexican, and a conflation between the Latina/o-Mexican and the figure of the illegal immigrant, so that all Latina/os are presumed to be illegal until evidence proves otherwise. (140)

Further, public and popular discourse often conflate Mexican and undocumented (im)migrants. To be clear, the commercial offers no direct commentary on (im)migration, nor did it include clips of political protests, naturalization ceremonies, or (im)migrants entering the US. Instead, comments about amnesty derive from the assumption that brown-skinned people and people who speak a language other than English are “illegals” and do not belong in the US. Cisneros indicates, “To be legal (a citizen) means to display the right feelings, through skin color and demeanor; to be illegal means to spur feelings of suspiciousness, threat, and out-of-place-ness”

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151 Further, public and popular discourse often conflate Mexican and undocumented (im)migrants.
Although none of the people featured in the commercial hold up signs saying “I am undocumented,” social media users such as Vampola and Starnes draw conclusions about citizenship status through skin color, language, dress, and affect, thus marking brown-skinned, Spanish-speaking people as “illegal,” suspicious, and a threat to the US nation-state.  

The racist and xenophobic condemnations alter the discourse surrounding the commercial spot, shifting from US diversity and inclusivity (concerning various identity markers) to anti-foreigner (and anti-Coke). Many of the comments from consumers/social media users focused less on the corporation (beyond the occasional #fuckcoke) and more on outrage over depictions of people of color, Muslims, and those perceived as “illegal” as US Americans who may choose to express their national and cultural pride by singing “America the Beautiful” in a language other than English. Further, claiming the advertisement exists as a form of propaganda pushing “amnesty for illegals” or identifying Coca-Cola as the “official soft drink of illegal crossing the border” presumes that people of color are foreigners, non- or anti-American, and that US America equals white and monolingual English-speakers. 

Social media users condemning “It’s Beautiful” offered clear evidence that explicit racial logic continues to flourish in the contemporary US. Albeit troubling and reprehensible, this discourse is easily recognized and people espousing such ideas are often publically shamed and condemned. Conversely, the more covert racial logic invading public discourses and cultural

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152 Anthropologist Jonathan Xavier Inda emphasizes not all immigrants are treated as problems for the US; he notes, “undocumented immigrants and Mexicans, have received a disproportionate share of anti-immigrant sentiment” (154).

153 Naming and focusing on the unprovoked responses of social media users should not position Coca-Cola as the wronged party or victim of malicious attacks. Coca-Cola is not exempt from critique, and consumers should take issue with the transnational corporation for its environmental contamination record, questionable marketing strategies, and alleged abusive labor practices (Harkinson). And, of course, the “It’s Beautiful” commercial ultimately exists to sell a product and continued attachment to the brand, even if the surface-level message focuses on diversity, patriotism, and the beauty of US America.
texts—as shown in “It’s Beautiful” and the wide range of texts previously evaluated—often goes unchecked because the ideas are couched in gender, class, nation, and local-based ideologies, which shifts attention away from race, racism, and white privilege. However, as the Coca-Cola responses highlight, and I as have argued throughout this project, racial logic continues to flourish in US immigration rhetoric.

In each of the preceding chapters, I established how anti- and pro-(im)migrant US cultural and legal texts suppress race by reframing the discourse with an emphasis on gender, class, nation, and localism. Racial logic infuses these texts but is less pronounced than the overtly racist responses to the Coke commercial. In order to unpack the colorblind discourse pervading the featured texts, I treated gender, class, and nation separately, explaining how each is used in pro- and anti-(im)migrant texts. This approach showed the intersections of US racial scripts and gender, class, and nationalist discourses. It also highlighted the intersections of race and gender, race and class, and race and nation in US (im)migration rhetoric. Additionally, in chapter four, I pointed to the ways that gender, class, and nation coexist within a local framework and each functions to suppress the presence of race. Of course, these pairings and the acknowledgement of coexistence offers an incomplete rendering of how race manifests in contemporary US (im)migration legal and cultural discourses.

An intersectional analysis of race, gender, sexuality, class, and nation offers a more comprehensive portrayal. I underscored the importance of a multiracial feminist framework that privileges intersectional analysis in the introduction to this project. We can also read much of the legal language and cultural scenes and exchanges featured in earlier chapters through an intersectional lens. For instance, in chapter one, I showed how racial scripts govern gender-based inclusion and exclusion in US (im)migration-themed texts. A closer look and intersectional
analysis of the documentary *Border*, for example, shows how the exclusion and expulsion of “hyperfertile” (im)migrant women (and their children) is not only motivated by exclusionary racial and sexist logic, but relies upon class- and nation-based ideologies as well. As shown in the first chapter, Chris Burgard, the film’s director and narrator, resents that his tax dollars support the education and medical care of “illegals” who he believes disrespect US law and should not be treated or valued as members of the US nation-state. In my earlier analysis of *Border*, I showed how Burgard’s exclusionary rationale vilifies (im)migrant women’s bodies and sexuality, as he indicates they bear too many children who then use services intended for US Americans. Yet, his objections to undocumented (im)migrants’ presence in his community also mark (im)migrants as financial drains and national outsiders. *Border* uses a multidimensional rationale to justify female (im)migrants’ exclusion from the US. Grounded in racial logic that manifests as concerns about appropriate gender, class, and nation-based behaviors, the rhetoric masquerades as race-neutral. Yet, an intersectional analysis highlights how (im)migrants from Mexico and Latin American nations (the subjects in *Border*) face racism, sexism, classism, and exclusionary nationalist objections to their presence in the US.

An intersectional analysis unveils the complex racial logic informing and invading US (im)migration-themed texts. While most of the featured texts suppress the role of race, I want to acknowledge exceptions exist (both within the project and larger political and cultural discourse on undocumented (im)migration). Within this study, I included two texts whose authors or contributors expose the racist logic informing US (im)migration discourse. T.C. Boyle’s *The Tortilla Curtain* interrogates the overlapping ideologies between supporters and opponents of California Proposition 187, showing how the “economics not race” discourse pervading both pro- and anti-camps relied deeply on racist logic. Additionally, the photographs submitted to the
Border Film Project by undocumented (im)migrants offer counterscripts, or images and messages challenging dominant US racial scripts. In chapter three, I acknowledged the images were shaped by and mediated though the visions of the BFP creators, but the photos also reject US racial scripts marking (im)migrants as sneaky and suspicious shadow people. Both the novel and select, anti-racist photographic images demonstrate that US cultural texts can serve as a forum for interrogating and resisting dominant US racial thought and practice. A shift toward anti-racist US (im)migration discourse and the inclusion of undocumented (im)migrants’ perspectives and experiences points to areas of necessary work and growth in US cultural and legal immigration-themed discourses.

While I have shown how racism, sexism, classism, nationalism, and localism all manifest in US (im)migration-themed discourse, I mainly evaluated texts and popular responses crafted by white, English-speaking, US-born men. These tight parameters have allowed for a concentrated study and interrogation of one particular perspective on undocumented (im)migration. However, these constraints have also left important voices and insights out of the current study. Future avenues for research include a sustained treatment of cultural texts produced by (im)migrants as well as an examination of pro-(im)migrant texts that assert a truly anti-racist agenda, thus broadening and complicating current considerations of contemporary pro-(im)migrant discourse. Future research questions include: who have dominant sources sought to erase, how do texts produced by (im)migrants’ make these subjects visible, and what types of language, rituals, or cultural memories do (im)migrants use when contesting and reimaging the exclusionary sexist, classist, and nationalist messages infusing US migrant-themed legal and cultural texts. The inclusion of cultural texts produced by (im)migrants would help amplify their voices in (im)migration discourse, underscore the heterogeneity of (im)migrant populations living and
working in the US, and facilitate a greater understanding of how (im)migrants’ inform and respond to US (im)migration policies and practices.
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APPENDIX A. IMAGE REQUEST AND APPROVAL

Border Film Project images
2 messages

Kate Schaab <kateschaab@gmail.com>  Sat, Apr 18, 2015 at 1:30 PM
To: brett@borderfilmproject.com, victoria@borderfilmproject.com, rudy@borderfilmproject.com

Hello,

My name is Kate Schaab; I'm a doctoral candidate in the American Culture Studies program at Bowling Green State University (OH).

I'm writing a dissertation about US cultural treatments of undocumented migrants. I've been analyzing some of the photos on the BFP site (both Minutemen and migrants). I'd love to be able to include images in the final version of the project, which would be searchable/readable within academic databases. I was wondering if this is a request you'd be willing to consider, and, if so, if there is a more formal process.

I've tried using the form and "hello" email on the web site, but these attempts have failed (the email seems to be full), which I why I'm reaching out directly to the three of you.

Thanks for your consideration,
Kate Schaab

Brett Huneycutt <brett.huneycutt@gmail.com>  Mon, Apr 20, 2015 at 8:49 AM
To: Kate Schaab <kateschaab@gmail.com>
Cc: "brett@borderfilmproject.com" <brett@borderfilmproject.com>, "victoria@borderfilmproject.com" <victoria@borderfilmproject.com>, "rudy@borderfilmproject.com" <rudy@borderfilmproject.com>

Kate,

You're welcome to use the images. Let us know if you need help.

Thanks,
Brett