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**SPACE, POWER, POLICY, AND THE CREATION OF THE
“ILLEGAL” MIGRANT AT THE UNITED STATES
BOUNDARY WITH MEXICO**

by

CATALINA BIESMAN-SIMONS

**SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL FULLFILLMENT OF
THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS**

PROFESSOR FORSTER

PROFESSOR LISS

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Introduction

The United States border with Mexico snagged a starring role in Donald Trump's campaign for presidency. His inflammatory rhetoric about constructing a wall to divide the two countries and impede migrant crossings rallied a legion of supporters, despite the lack of a coherent plan to fund and construct the project. At a speech in Phoenix in 2016, Trump provided the following details as to the wall's creation and character, "Mexico will pay for the wall...an impenetrable physical, tall, power, beautiful southern border wall...[using] the best technology"¹. Critics have generally discredited the type of border wall proposed by Trump as financially unmanageable, and infinitely challenging to construct given the topography of the borderlands. Yet the zeal with which his followers support the project prompts questions about the relationship between spatial constructions and power, both symbolic and physical.

President Trump's talk of border walls, the use of the military at the country's southern boundary, and even his threat at the end of October 2018 to deny the children of noncitizens the right to U.S. citizenship all echo historical socio-political controversy surrounding the borderlands in the 1990s, and earlier². The boundary between the U.S. and Mexico stretches approximately 1,954 miles, only around 700 of which contained any barrier or infrastructure as of 2017³. The notion of a "wall" fails to capture the multifaceted nature of a boundary constructed not only through the physical presence of technology, architecture, and law enforcement, but also via the public sentiment and

¹ Donald Trump, "Address on Immigration." (speech, Phoenix, AZ, September 1, 2016).

² John Wagner, John Dawsey, and Felicia Sonmez, "Trump vows executive order to end birthright citizenship, a move most legal experts say would run afoul of the Constitution." *The Washington Post* (D.C., US), October 30, 2018, Politics.

³ Ronald Rael, and Teddy Cruz, *Borderwall as Architecture: A Manifesto for the U.S.-Mexico Boundary* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2017), 11.

policy that work to justify those physical manifestations. The diverse range of fence structures found at the boundary include in their construction, “steel tubes, barbed wire, recycled rail road tracks, wire mesh, or reinforced concrete—even repurposed Vietnam-era Air Force landing strips”. Modern boundary architectures further make use of a range of technology, from aerostat blimps to heat sensors⁴. Some pieces of the fence are multilayered based on environment and frequency of crossings⁵. The premise of upholding national security necessarily informs the boundary’s material construction, as the number of intercepted unauthorized crossings is used to measure its success. While U.S. barrier designs reflect their unique geographic contexts, less obvious are the ways in which the spaces created by these constructions inform power dynamics at the boundary.

The following discussion seeks to explore the recent history of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands through the lens of spatial power dynamics and the socio-political boundary practices that create them. The investigation begins with a consideration of the interface between territorial space and power. The following sections trace the history of the U.S. relationship to its southern boundary with Mexico. The subsequent section examines the U.S. political developments of the 1990s; specifically those that sought to shift unauthorized crossings toward rural areas, and consequently changed the socio-physical composition of the boundary through policy.

With socio-spatial ideas as the analytical framework, this approach to U.S. political history with respect to the southern boundary allows for an exploration of the political impact on these boundary spaces. The resulting diverse boundary constructions

⁴ Ronald Rael, and Teddy Cruz, *Borderwall as Architecture*, 11.

⁵ Ron Nixon, "On the Mexican Border, a Case for Technology Over Concrete." *The New York Times* (New York, NY), June 20, 2017, Politics, accessed September 5, 2018.

are politically symbolic, socially performative, and in a constant state of re-creation. The boundary finds political expression in its efforts to regulate U.S. territory and sovereignty. At the same time, these political efforts are informed and justified by a public sentiment that often regards white-North American society as fundamentally distinct, which then necessitates the performance of a physical manifestation of difference between the U.S. public and its southern neighbors. Despite these state-led attempts to enforce U.S. sovereignty and control human movement, the agency of migrants, smugglers, and anyone else interested in crossing the divide outside of a port of entry necessarily react to the U.S. boundary arrangements and transform those spaces in doing so. The relationship between U.S. policy and mainstream public narratives surrounding immigration from Mexico worked in tandem to generate ideas of illegality at the boundary, and ultimately inspired the construction of physical expressions of U.S. sovereign control at the southern boundary with Mexico, which reflected and reproduced the very same understandings of asymmetrical power that created them.

Socio-spatial Organization: Territorial boundaries in the ancient Mediterranean and Europe

Extensive efforts to legislate a firm boundary into existence where previously there existed only the idea of a Cartesian line to separate the United States from Mexico reflect efforts to spatially produce power. The desire to establish territorial distinctions and practice sovereign control over space is not unique to recent history. In the earliest recorded story, the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the poet emphasizes the “massive wall, of Uruk,” Uruk being the city or given territory contained by the wall and subject to King

Gilgamesh's rule⁶. In the 5th Century B.C., the famous Greek historian Herodotus offered an explanation of the system of provinces and satraps, officials we might now call governors, which made up King Darius' Persian Empire⁷. Yet as Benedict Anderson astutely concludes in his *Imagined Communities*, these notions of spatial distinctions do not arise from the ether, but are instead products of a public imaginary⁸. A brief look at spatial theories helps to explain the vehemence with which the U.S. currently seeks to police its own (perhaps imagined) community by controlling its southern boundary, and exposes the relationships between space and socio-politically fabricated power.

In his work on the advent of the political divide between France and Spain in the 1700s, historian Peter Sahlins proposes helpful terminology to distinguish types of border space. He uses the term "boundary" to refer to the politicized line that divides two countries, while the "frontier" contains "the distinct jurisdiction that each state establishes near the boundary for the purposes of its internal administration"⁹. For Sahlins, the zone of the frontier is comprised of both tangible and intangible elements, ranging from residents, to infrastructure, to political symbolism. Consequently, while the boundary outlines a territory, frontier space informs and produces sovereign power through its concomitant infrastructures.

⁶ Stephen Mitchell, *Gilgamesh: A New English Version* (New York, NY: Free Press, 2006), 69 and 198.

⁷ Herodotus, *The Landmark Herodotus: The Histories*, ed. Robert B. Strassler and Andrea L. Purvis (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 2007), 3.89.

⁸ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London, UK: Verso, 2006), 21-22.

⁹ Peter Sahlins, *Boundaries: The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989), 4-5.

In her feminist critique of architectural and spatial phenomena, Leslie Weisman reaches a similar conclusion. She posits that the ways in which we organize people and buildings imitates and supports existing social concepts. Through these culturally informed physical constructions, she argues, we institutionalize social hierarchies via spatial arrangements¹⁰. By privileging particular types of behaviors while inhibiting others, space and spatial constructions are, at the same time, a product and producer of social relationships. Take for example the ways in which the Romans reproduced social customs through the arrangement of their military camps. The historian Polybius, writing c. 264 BC, detailed the rise of the Roman Empire and offers a lengthy description of Roman military practices. The Roman military, unlike their peers at the time, sought to create identical installations irrespective of location. Polybius explains that, “they have just one simple scheme for their camps, which they use in all circumstances and terrains”¹¹. He further details the ways in which the form of a Roman camp aids in both military communications and the defense of their newly created microcosm of Roman society. Polybius concludes that this strategy of identical encampments was central to Roman military success, as it preserved social order and ensured that each man was familiar not just with the physical layout of any camp anywhere, but also with his specific role within it. By maintaining the same spatial organization, and thus the same rigid hierarchies characteristic of Roman society, Roman camps reinforced existing social systems through the physical arrangement of their camps.

¹⁰ Leslie Kanes Weisman, *Discrimination by Design: a Feminist Critique of the Man-Made Environment*, 1994 ed. (n.p.: Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois, 1992), 2.

¹¹ Polybius, "Book Six" In *The Histories*, trans. Robin Waterfield, ed. B. C. McGing (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 6.26.

Camillo Boano takes socio-spatial analysis a step further, echoing the landmark work *The Production of Space* (Lefebvre, 1974), by proposing that space is both a social product and “a mental product”. Spaces are shaped by the ways in which we define, discuss, and imagine them. For example, two city streets possessing the same physical makeup would be made utterly distinct if it were generally accepted that one was a place of danger and the other of safety¹². Such is often the case at the U.S.-Mexico boundary, where Anglo-Americans imagine their country as one of ordered security, the boundary a place of chaos, and Mexico an alien land¹³. These socially crafted perceptions dictate the ways in which people seek to physically navigate a given space, or politically manage it. Take the distinct strategies at work on the U.S. northern boundary with Canada versus the southern boundary with Mexico. Few newspaper articles regard the Canadian boundary with militant urgency; whereas U.S. government officials, and the press coverage aimed at white elites, have often painted the boundary with Mexico as the threshold of anarchy. These mental perceptions then inform socio-political reactions to each space, and in the case of the Mexican boundary ultimately create policies that change the physical shape of the boundary and reinforce these social prejudices.

Weisman’s analysis follows a similar path, as she relates spatial discriminations to social expressions of power through the lens of dichotomies. She advises that the classification of persons into opposing groups, usually by those in power, necessarily “creates a social system that justifies and supports human exploitation and white male

¹² Camillo Boano, “Violent spaces’: Production and reproduction of security and vulnerabilities.” *The Journal of Architecture* 16, no. 1 (2011): 44.

¹³ Ramón Gutiérrez, “The Erotic Zone: Sexual Transgression on the U.S.-Mexican Border.” In *Mapping Multiculturalism*, ed. Avery F. Gordon and Christopher Newfield (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 257-258.

supremacy”¹⁴. She argues that systems of oppression rest upon the assumption of sharp difference between one group and another, and regards dichotomous narratives such as good/bad or self/other as indispensable in understanding the interface between space and power. White U.S. elite narratives often create a binary of self (U.S.) and other (Mexico) when discussing immigration. Whatever the origin or veracity of such categories, this Anglo-elite conjecture nonetheless creates a discourse of dichotomy wherein the Mexican is regarded as an inhuman “illegal,” posing a constant threat to sovereign “American” space and the “American” life that resides there¹⁵. For Weisman, such a socio-physical divide unavoidably creates an unequal relationship of influence in which “one group is afforded power and status and the other rendered powerless and inferior”¹⁶. Within this spatial framework, the boundary operates as an imposer of dichotomies, a spatial product and producer of an unequal relationship of power. As Reece Jones notes in his discussion of the United States so-called “War on Terror”, structures and practices at the boundary provide, “a material manifestation of the abstract idea of sovereignty, which brings the claim of territorial difference into being” and justifies U.S. government initiatives to act against perceived outsiders¹⁷. This symbolic creation of a boundary not only divides two nation-states, but also reinforces the perceived differences among the people who live on either side.

Spatial privilege and jurisdictions operate on a more basic level in our everyday lives by way of the social norms that govern public areas. Examples include things as

¹⁴ Weisman, *Discrimination by Design*, 10.

¹⁵ Gutiérrez, "The Erotic Zone," 254.

¹⁶ Weisman, *Discrimination by Design*, 10.

¹⁷ Reece Jones, *Border Walls: Security and the War on Terror in the United States, India, and Israel* (London, UK: Zed Books Ltd, 2012), 2 and 171.

mundane as saving a seat for a friend, or choosing an appropriate physical distance at which to speak to someone. In 2014, New York City's Metropolitan Transportation Authority campaigned against "manspreading" on the subway, a movement sparked by debate over the gendered experience of occupying public space. Women complained that men occupied, and appeared to feel entitled to, more than their fair share of public transit space by spreading their bodies out in relaxed postures, making it difficult for women to share those public spaces with them¹⁸. Weisman argues that nation-states operate in much the same way as these individual space-claimants, defining territoriality as the "claiming and defending of social, built, and metaphysical space"¹⁹. Territories function as expressions of personal identity and work to create a "spatial and psychological boundary between the self and other"²⁰. For Weisman, regarding space and the claiming of spaces as elements of identity, in which the self is defined via difference to other spaces, may help explain why claimants (individual or national) defend their claims so adamantly. The Belgian judge and scholar Charles de Visscher was of a similar mind when he wrote, "It is because the state is a territorial organization that the violation of its boundaries is inseparable from the idea of aggression against the state itself"²¹. In this way, our understanding of a country's territory is necessarily informed by the same social dichotomies that justify the existence of two distinct regions in the first place.

How then, did a spatial arrangement of power emerge in the U.S.-Mexican frontier, and what social discourses produced its construction? We have seen that the

¹⁸ Fitzsimmons, Emma. "A Scourge is Spreading. MTA's Cure? Dude, Close Your Legs." *New York Times* (New York, NY), December 20, 2014.

¹⁹ Weisman, *Discrimination by Design*, 10.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.

²¹ Sahlins, *Boundaries*, 3.

drawing of a boundary is a dynamic practice that functions on many levels. As a political policy and social rhetoric, it seeks to uphold sovereign power and govern the international movement of people and goods. This practice of territoriality at the frontier functions, then, as a product and producer that reinforces and defends social dichotomies. This perpetuates an unequal relationship of power at work on both an individual and national scale.

An Incomplete History of Border Relations

In 1821 the Republic of Mexico surfaced, weary from its struggle to overthrow Spanish colonial rule, only to find itself confronting a different colonial power to the north, the United States. With the threat of retribution from Spain removed, the U.S. prepared to consume the remaining land between itself and the Pacific Ocean²². By this time Anglo-settlers were well versed in colonial occupation, having systematically terrorized, killed, and displaced the Native American populations since their arrival on the continent²³. Anglo-settlers in Texas had formed a roving patrol group called the Texas Rangers, a militia unit that sought to violently subdue local indigenous populations, and “settled scores with anyone who challenged the Anglo-American” community building project in Texas. The Texas Rangers proved essential in helping Anglo-settlers secure advantageous land agreements against existing Mexican landowners in the area, as historian Leslie Hernández notes, “raw physical violence was the Rangers’ principal strategy”²⁴. After the annexation of Texas in 1836, the U.S. continued to encroach on the

²² Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2014), 121.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Kelly Lytle Hernández, *Migra!: A History of the U.S. Border Patrol* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2010), 50.

provinces of Northern Mexico, until Congress officially declared war in 1846²⁵. In the resulting Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, Mexico signed away about half of its lands in the north²⁶. This agreement outlined the divide between the two countries, and fences were built soon after²⁷. Upon the creation of this official boundary, an area previously characterized by freedom of movement became a site of political spatial distinction, complete with the concomitant ideology of international immigration. Migration movements across this boundary can largely be attributed to socio-economic inequality, a need to escape political unrest, and an enduring white American desire for cheap labor. These push-pull factors often outweigh the risks of crossing the boundary in spite of the U.S.' historic and contemporary efforts to discourage migrants.

Congress spent years finely honing a long list of persons to exclude from the country in a variety of legislation ranging from 1875 to present²⁸. Following the end of American Civil War, individual states developed immigration regulations for their own limited jurisdictions. Yet a few years later, in 1875, in a case concerning the arrival of a Chinese woman by ship to California, *Chy Lung v. Freeman*, the Supreme Court ruled that, "The passage of laws which concern the admission of citizens and subjects of foreign nations to our shores belongs to Congress, and not to the States". "If it be otherwise," asserted Justice Miller, the author of the court's decision, "a single state can

²⁵ Dunbar-Ortiz, *An Indigenous People's History of the United States*, 123.

²⁶ Hernández, *Migra!: A History*, 54.

²⁷ Ronald Rael, and Teddy Cruz, *Borderwall as Architecture*, 10.

²⁸ Hernández, *Migra!: A History*, 63-65.

at her pleasure embroil us in disastrous quarrels with other nations”²⁹. Thus foiled at the state level, immigration policy production was assigned to the U.S. federal Congress.

The Immigration Act of 1891 established the government’s right to detain migrants for inspection, and phrased this notion in such a way as to create an in-between space for those seeking entry. This provision, known as “entry fiction,” dictated that if a migrant were held for further scrutiny in the U.S., such presence would “not be considered a landing during the pendency of such examination”³⁰. This language created a liminal zone for the would-be-migrant in which he or she was simultaneously physically present and legally not-present within the nation’s boundaries. The Immigration Act of 1907 similarly constructed distinct spaces for the migrant. It required all those desirous of admission to utilize an official port of entry, thus creating a distinction between sanctioned and unsanctioned spaces by which to enter the country. The law further mandated that migrants acquiesce to inspection, and obtain official clearance to enter the U.S.³¹. This legislation launched not only a precedent for conceiving of immigration within state mandated legal margins, but also of legal and extralegal spaces by which to enter the country.

In 1908 the rumblings of revolution in Mexico began to concern U.S. officials. The policies of the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz, who was President of Mexico from 1876-1911, had led to an increasing number of land disputes and persistent poverty

²⁹ *Chy Lung v. Freeman*, 92 U.S. 275 (1875).

³⁰ Daniel Wilsher, *Immigration Detention: Law, History, Politics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 13.

³¹ Hernández, *Migra!: A History*, 22.

among Mexico's rural residents³². Although Díaz briefly agreed to cede power in 1910, he soon reversed his position and oppressed his political adversaries. One of his rivals, Francisco Madero, fled persecution and called for Mexicans to rise up against the corrupt government, sparking a revolt that would ultimately devolve into a civil war³³. To assuage their unease about the Mexican Revolution, the U.S. sent military forces to the boundary, which necessarily shifted associated relationships of power at the frontier. The military was ordered to the boundary in June of 1908 by then Secretary of War Taft. The *Los Angeles Herald* reported that the U.S. Secretary of War William Taft commanded troops to Del Rio, El Paso, and other places along the Texas boundary “to aid the civil authorities in preserving order” and “prevent any outbreaks within the United States territory”³⁴. The journalist neglected to explain what sort of “outbreaks” might be prevented by the military, but the message was clear: civil unrest was a contagious disease, and its carriers were Mexican nationals. The representation of the U.S. as a beacon of justice and order, as opposed to a Mexico comprised of lawless chaos, remained a popular theme throughout the mainstream press coverage of the Revolution. The *Los Angeles Times* echoed the sentiment in November of 1910 when it reported that a cavalry unit had been ordered to the boundary, to aid the troops already there. “Notification has been sent to all commanding officers along the frontier to take all steps necessary to preserve order”³⁵. Ironically, all of this military maneuvering in service of

³² *Ibid.*, 61.

³³ Rachel St. John, *Line in the Sand: A History of the Western U.S.-Mexico Border* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), 210-211, digital file.

³⁴ Associated Press, "U.S. Troops to Guard Mexican Border Region." *Los Angeles Herald* (Los Angeles, CA), June 30, 1908. 1.

³⁵ Associated Press, "Telegraph Seized by Mexican Government." *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, CA), November 22, 1910, 1.

“order” was done in the name of upholding U.S. neutrality laws³⁶. Despite the concerns of U.S. officials, historian Rachel St. John notes that many Anglo-Americans appeared “to take for granted that respect for U.S. sovereignty and the few U.S. soldiers stationed on the boundary line would prevent Mexican combatants from crossing the border”³⁷. Their belief in the juridical and ideological manifestation of the boundary was so strong as to inspire a group of U.S. citizens to arrange themselves along the imaginary line to observe the Battle of Tijuana in 1911³⁸. With the election of President Woodrow Wilson in 1912, supposed neutrality soon became a distant memory. With Wilson at the helm, the U.S. refused to recognize the Mexican government led by Huerta, made it extremely difficult for Huerta to acquire foreign aid or arms, and stationed a few U.S. Navy ships in Mexico’s Tampico Bay. In early April 1914, international relations worsened exponentially with an incident involving Navy men from the U.S.S. *Dolphin*. This drama resulted in Congress granting permission to invade Mexico, and by April 23rd U.S. forces occupied the port of Veracruz, where they remained until November of that same year³⁹. Peace was negotiated in May 1914, however, it did not last as the U.S. continued to meddle in Mexico’s affairs in hopes of securing a leader amenable to U.S. interests. In 1916, after the revolutionary Francisco “Pancho” Villa’s forces attacked a New Mexican border town; the U.S. War Department ordered troops under the command of General John J. Pershing to “proceed promptly across the border in pursuit of the Mexican band

³⁶ *Los Angeles Daily Times* (Los Angeles, CA), "Commanders in Conference, International Aspect of the Revolt Considered." November 29, 1910, 2.

³⁷ St. John, *Line in the Sand*, 215.

³⁸ St. John, *Line in the Sand*, 215-216.

³⁹ U.S. Government. "The Mexican Revolution and the United States in the Collections of the Library of Congress," Library of Congress.

which attacked the town of Columbus, New Mexico⁴⁰. This directive to violate Mexican sovereign territory to capture Villa was not well received by the Mexican government, and even less well received by the Mexican people⁴¹. Not until February of 1917 would General Pershing's futile Punitive Expedition completely withdraw from Mexico⁴².

The U.S. behavior with respect to the revolution offers insight on the relationship between sovereign power and physical space. In its alleged efforts to restore "order" to both the boundary and the Mexican nation-state, the U.S. physically infringed on Mexican territory. This representation of the U.S. as a harbinger of socio-political stability sits in contrast to depictions of the "Mexican Situation" (as many newspapers termed the Revolution) of violent chaos. The U.S. press spent a little over a decade describing Mexico as a zone of anarchy, and consequently impacted the public imaginary and understanding of Mexican space as a producer of social discord⁴³. The enemy in this scenario was not necessarily Mexico or its citizenry, but the production of revolutionary ideas that were sweeping through Mexico, and crossing into the U.S. as revolutionaries on both sides of the boundary sought change. By thinking of Mexico as a dangerous region separated from the U.S. by the most essential of Cartesian lines, these imaginings informed socially inspired spatial dichotomies which would later be reflected in increasing concerns about controlling the boundary.

The Immigration Act of 1917, enacted before the end of the Mexican Revolution, delineated even more types of persons to be denied admission to the country, including

⁴⁰ John Sheldon Doud Eisenhower, *Intervention!: The United States and the Mexican Revolution, 1913-1917* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 1993), 230-231.

⁴¹ Eisenhower, *Intervention!*, 236.

⁴² Eisenhower, *Intervention!*, 335.

⁴³ Boano, "'Violent spaces,'" 44.

anarchists. It further established literacy tests, health exams and raised entry fees. Mexican laborers were briefly exempt from some of these exams, particularly the literacy requirement, as Southwestern agricultural businesses were desperate for laborers in the midst of U.S. participation in World War I, but this leniency did not last⁴⁴. In 1921, Congress passed the first numerical limit on all migrants with the Quota Act, and the National Origins Act, which followed in 1924, mandated quotas based on nationality⁴⁵. However, due to the financial interests of Southwestern agribusiness in the Mexican labor force, the Western hemisphere was exempted from the 1924 origin-based quotas⁴⁶. This provision alarmed nativist anxieties about unregulated Mexican entry into the U.S. In 1921, the Mexican newspaper *Excelsior* published an article detailing the stance of Texas Senator John Box. They write of his opinion, “dijo que la corriente de trabajadores mexicanos estaba envenenando a la población del sur” and that the Mexican migrants, “degradaban el civismo...eran inasimilables”⁴⁷. Senator Box echoed the views of his predecessors by depicting Mexico and its people as instigators “poisoning” the American population with their presence, and inspiring immorality and civic disorder. These arguments reveal an irrational enmity for people of other countries. The resultant legislation guided by xenophobia, regarded the ability to control space, specifically human mobility across national boundaries, as the solution to domestic concerns ranging from employment to the construction of the nation’s identity. Nativists made similar

⁴⁴ Hernández, *Migra!: A History*, 64 and 172.

⁴⁵ Joseph Nevins, "The Law of the Land: Local-National Dialectic and the Making of the United States-Mexico Boundary in Southern California," *Historical Geography* 28 (2000): 46.

⁴⁶ Hernández, *Migra!: A History*, 65-66.

⁴⁷ "Serán Rechazados los Braceros Mexicanos," *Excelsior* (Ciudad de México, México), January 11, 1921. 1. Quotes translated: “he said that the current of Mexican workers was poisoning the population of the south” and that the Mexican migrants, “corroded civility...and were without the possibility of assimilation”.

arguments a few years later with the passage of the 1924 National Origins Act, and in the following days the U.S. Border Patrol was established as part of the Department of Labor with the Labor Appropriations Act⁴⁸.

Although at first the Border Patrol's mandate was a mystery even to themselves, their funding limited, and their authority negligible, Congress soon passed another Act to further define their position. Under the Act of February 27, 1925, a Border Patrol agent could, "arrest any alien who in his presence or view is entering or attempting to enter the United States in violation of any law or regulation made in pursuance of law regulating the admission of aliens"⁴⁹. The Act further offered officers the authority to "board and search for aliens any vessel within the territorial waters of the United States, railway car, conveyance, or vehicle in which he believes aliens are being brought into the United States"⁵⁰. This broad directive and power to arrest offered the Border Patrol a large jurisdiction, which would be expanded, contracted, and otherwise reimagined in later years. The advent of the Border Patrol necessarily changed the power dynamics at work in the U.S.-Mexico frontier, both at the national and personal level. Agents employed by a branch of the federal government joined the imaginary political line dividing the two countries, and thus began the process of changing a previously flexible space for human movement into a monitored one. On an individual basis, with the power to "board and search," agents forever changed the parameters of personal space for the migrant now deemed "illegal". Instead of respecting social norms dictating personal boundaries, and the control of an individual over his own property, agents were now authorized to invade

⁴⁸ Nevins, "The Law of the Land," 46.

⁴⁹ Hernández, *Migra!: A History*, 78-79.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 79.

those spaces based on suspicion alone. This legal permission, and indeed mandate, to occupy space and actively attempt to control it shifted both spatial and socio-political privilege to the hands of the Border Patrol.

The advent of the Border Patrol ushered in the 1930s, during which time the agency conducted mass deportations of supposed unauthorized migrants. The anti-Mexican focus of the organization resulted in the deportation of “at least half a million” persons of Mexican ancestry, “about half or more of which were U.S. citizens”⁵¹. This move reflects a broader trend of U.S. immigration attitudes, whereby times of economic hardship, in this case the Great Depression, result in increased anti-migrant sentiment. Migrants, often those of color, are immediately seen as an impediment to employment opportunities for supposedly deserving U.S. citizens, and this logic—however false it may be—fosters xenophobia⁵². Deportation necessarily functions as a form of spatial control, as federal officials are literally removing persons from domestic space and depositing them in international spaces—with or without the consent of the individual being moved. This is a reflection of the myth that migrants take up U.S. space—in homes, in classrooms, in jobs; which could, in their absence, be offered to allegedly deserving citizens. The removal of specific persons further reflects an unequal valuation of territory, as supporters of deportation clearly put a premium on U.S. space, and belittle international territory by shuttling those they deem undesirable to other countries.

⁵¹ Jimmy Patiño, *Raza Sí, Migra No: Chicano Movement Struggles for Immigrant Rights in San Diego* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 51.

⁵² Patiño, *Raza Sí, Migra No*, 47.

After the violent expulsion of migrant workers in the 1930s, the advent of WWII and the exodus of men into the army sparked fears of a labor shortage in the U.S. The Bracero Program, launched in 1942, exemplifies the U.S. paradoxical desire to deny human mobility while simultaneously securing the economic opportunities offered by migrant labor. President Roosevelt negotiated with the Mexican government to provide temporary work visas to a set number of Mexican farm laborers⁵³. Congress extended the program on a yearly basis after the war's conclusion given the success of the U.S. post-war economy, and in 1951 it became Public Law. Even so, the demand for labor remained high, and agricultural businesses were known to recruit undocumented laborers to fill their ranks for even cheaper wages⁵⁴.

Public anxiety about border control began to increase during the 1950s, which most scholars attribute to the widespread hysteria over communism and its perceived threat to elite American society⁵⁵. In a letter to the editor published in the *Sacramento Bee* in 1953, a reader described Mexican migrants crossing the U.S. border as “lawless hordes,” who were likely “agents of Moscow”. In closing he wrote, “We all know these facts, and yet we sleep on while our enemies poison our children and prepare to cut our throats”⁵⁶. Later that same year, an article in the *San Diego Union* quotes then U.S. Attorney General Bronwell’s observations about Mexican migrants after his tour of the borderlands, “We must be careful to see that American workmen are not displaced or

⁵³ Douglas S. Massey, Jorge Durand, and Nolan J. Malone. *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors: Mexican Immigration in an Era of Economic Integration* (New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation, 2002), 35.

⁵⁴ Massey et. al., *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors*, 36.

⁵⁵ Massey et. al., *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors*, 37; Nevins, "The Law of the Land," 45.

⁵⁶ Fred McGimsey, "Editor of the Bee--Sir: Dangerous Traffic," *The Sacramento Bee* (Sacramento, CA), February 5, 1953, Editorial, 36.

wage levels depressed by alien labor”⁵⁷. Such rhetoric was perhaps a foreboding precursor to the Immigration and Naturalization Service’s infamous “Operation Wetback” in the summer of 1954. The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) sought to deport as many undocumented migrants as they could find, and simultaneously increased the number of Bracero visas issued. While officials hailed the Operation as immensely successful, historian Leslie Hernández notes that although the Border Patrol attributed one million deportations to the Operation during the fiscal year of 1954 (which covered June 1953-June 1954), the Operation had only been in place for the last twenty days of that period, making such numbers highly improbable⁵⁸. Operation Wetback, though not as effective as officials would have the public believe, nonetheless represented a pivotal moment as the Border Patrol reconfigured their mission at the frontier. The early 1950s found Border Patrol agents pushing two stories of the Mexican migrant. The first posed agents as liberators, heroes fighting against modern slavery. The second perpetuated the myth that the unauthorized migrant, or indeed any migrant, possessed criminal tendencies. As a Border Patrol agent wrote in a report in 1953, “they commit various depredations”⁵⁹. Thus the depiction of the unsanctioned laborer became further entrenched in stereotypes of naiveté, the individual who has not realized he surely requires U.S. officials to save him from his own actions, and illegality, as crossing and working were defined as crimes by the U.S. government. The frontier was consequently constructed as a zone of moral warfare, wherein the Border Patrol was responsible for

⁵⁷ "Bigger Border Patrol Urged," *San Diego Union* (San Diego, CA), August 16, 1953, 19.

⁵⁸ Hernández, *Migra!: A History*, 302.

aiding the simple laborer and, more importantly, protecting white American society from the migrant's dangerous influence by upholding the country's immigration laws.

For a brief moment the Border Patrol's heightened insistence on control seemed an ideal compromise—at least for the Anglo-American parties involved—nativists could take heart in the increased policing of migrants, while growers could access the migrant labor they required via the Bracero Program. However, newspapers continued to publish articles that painted the Mexican migrant in negative terms, suggesting that white public anxiety remained un-soothed⁶⁰. Given the U.S. habit of crossing the border to indulge in “vice,” historian Ramón Gutiérrez writes that, “the international boundary between Mexico and the United States has long been imagined as a border that separates a pure from an impure body, a virtuous body from a sinful one”⁶¹. This emphasis on an ethical dichotomy divided by the boundary is evident in reports like one from 1953, which notes that, “upon the heels of the vast army of wetbacks... is the problem of prostitution,”⁶² as if sex-work could be attributed to a race or country of origin. This fiction of white moral superiority extends far back into the country's history, perhaps taking root during colonization and genocide against Native American populations. The Anglo transplants that arrived on the east coast of the U.S. and made their way westward did so at the expense of indigenous lives. It was a cost they justified through the same language of opposite extremes, the most obvious example being the “savage” versus the civilized

⁵⁹ Hernández, *Migra!: A History*, 308-313.

⁶⁰ Joseph Nevins, *Operation Gatekeeper and Beyond: The War on "Illegals" and the Remaking of the U.S.-Mexico Boundary*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2010), 71.

⁶¹ Gutiérrez, "The Erotic Zone," 255-256.

⁶² Hernández, *Migra!: A History*, 313.

settler⁶³. In the words of historian Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, there exists a well-rooted “myth of an exceptional US American people destined to bring order out of chaos”⁶⁴. This narcissistic lore of U.S. cultural preeminence helps white Americans justify the discrimination and the need to secure themselves against perceived outside groups. As a result, the narrative enters the foreground of the U.S. racial reality and composes an essential thread in the socio-cultural fabric of the frontier, and efforts to police it.

The social construction of good and bad separated by the U.S.-Mexican boundary provided the foundation for white residents of the Southwest U.S. to decide they were in need of protection from their (international) neighbors. By conjuring a threat from these social anxieties, residents and legislators legitimized the need for law enforcement in the frontier. Consequently, narratives of the Mexican migrant as hazardous to Anglo elites’ values fed public acceptance of boundary militarization, interdiction, and ultimately vocal support for such practices.

The Narrative that Normalized Boundary Control

The heightened political activity concerning the U.S.-Mexico boundary in the 1990s did not emerge from the ether fully realized, but rather grew from the legacy of anti-Mexican migrant discourse. These arguments against migrants developed against the socio-economic backdrop of the U.S., and the political abandonment of the welfare state as a viable option. In the aftermath of 1954’s Operation Wetback, and perhaps even earlier when President Franklin D. Roosevelt moved the INS from the Department of Labor to the Department of Justice, immigration control was reinvented as a story of

⁶³ Dunbar-Ortiz, *An Indigenous Peoples' History*.

⁶⁴ Dunbar-Ortiz, *An Indigenous Peoples' History*, 178.

crime control⁶⁵. Quarrels over employment opportunities for U.S. citizens, and who deserved the right to welfare remained talking points in favor of gaining control of the frontier. These arguments found a broader, more vocal, base of support in the latter half of the 1970s, as the working class in the U.S. began to feel the effects of de-industrialization⁶⁶. The sharp increase in the perception of the boundary with Mexico as perilously permeable, and the continued criminalization of immigration, morphed the mainstream white public discussion of the “Mexican situation” into one of imminent threat and crisis⁶⁷. These narratives of dangers posed by migrants were cultivated within the well-established social dichotomy of ‘self’ (Anglo-centric U.S.) and alien ‘other’ (foreign migrants, especially those of color). The binary was reinforced spatially by the boundary’s physical manifestation in the form of agents, fences, and technology. Politicians increasingly turned to themes of the Mexican migrant as hazardous to the American social fabric to justify the institutionalization of the U.S. boundary with Mexico, and to provide a scapegoat for a range of social ills. Press coverage often echoed this language of impending calamity; in spite of statistical evidence that immigrants—documented or otherwise—were not in fact a threat to the U.S. economy, jobs, welfare, or the crime rate⁶⁸.

The 1970s were a decade of de-industrialization in the U.S., and working class laborers felt the greatest effects of the economic changes at work in the country. Their experience of socio-economic strife provided fresh fuel for the racially charged cultural

⁶⁵ Hernández, *Migra!: A History*, 229.

⁶⁶ Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007), 40.

⁶⁷ "Situation Acute in Mexico." *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, CA), November 23, 1910, 1-2.

⁶⁸ Bill Hillburg, "Mexican Immigrants a Drain on Region's Resources." *Daily News of Los Angeles* (Los Angeles, CA), July 13, 2001.

anxiety about undocumented migrants. Historian Peter Sahlins provides a deft explanation of the relationship between nation building, and the construction of social binaries in a seemingly post-factual context. He writes, “National identity is a...continuous process of defining ‘friend’ and ‘enemy,’ a logical extension of the process of maintaining boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’ within more local communities.” National identities fabricated with this dialectical structure as their foundation do not require literal differences, but rather “the subjective experience of difference”. Consequently, national identity is conditional, a relational definition in which socio-spatial boundaries separate the collective ‘self’ from its understood opposite, the ‘other’⁶⁹. Although economic history refutes the social logic that dominated at the time, false analyses of the U.S. condition, which saw migrants as the cause for the ill effects many claimed to suffer, persevered on a national scale⁷⁰. Consequently, narratives outlining the hazards of unauthorized immigration, and a view of the frontier as dangerously out of control were regarded as viable explanations for the Anglo-American experience.

The construction of the Mexican migrant as a looming threat to the American way of life can be seen in the rhetoric of public officials. In 1976, President Ford blamed the state of the U.S. economy on migrants, stating, “The main problem is how to get rid of those 6 to 8 million aliens who are interfering with our economic prosperity”⁷¹. Ford’s U.S. Attorney General William Saxbe felt similarly, and complained that unauthorized migrants posed “a severe national crisis,” citing employment, welfare, and crime among

⁶⁹ Sahlins, *Boundaries*, 270-271.

⁷⁰ Hillburg, "Mexican Immigrants..."

⁷¹ Nevins, *Operation Gatekeeper and Beyond*, 63.

reasons for deportation. Author Joseph Nevins notes that chief among fear mongers was the INS Commissioner Leonard Chapman who served under President Ford (from 1974 to 1976). Commissioner Chapman, “fanned the flames by frequently putting forth wildly exaggerated and inconsistent estimates of the number of unauthorized immigrants in the United States,” numbers that the press then distributed to the nation⁷². Chapman’s dramatic language linked fears of “illegal aliens” to a wide range of social problems, particularly unemployment and lawlessness. In 1974, at a congressional subcommittee he claimed that if more resources were allocated to the INS his organization could provide “up to one million jobs ‘virtually overnight’ for unemployed Americans”⁷³. Chapman’s rhetoric essentially develops a spatial narrative in that, in his view, migrants should not be permitted to occupy jobs, homes, or socio-cultural spaces within the U.S. His argument rests on the familiar binary of ‘self’ and ‘other,’ in which one group takes social, and consequently spatial precedence over the other. The Carter administration felt similarly concerned about the impact of migrants, and in 1977 *The Washington Post* reported that President Carter had established, “a special Cabinet-level panel to deal with the rapidly increasing problem of illegal aliens”⁷⁴. New York Representative Lester Wolff took a tour of the U.S.-Mexico boundary with his Select House Committee that same year, and upon returning compared the situation to France’s border strategy against Nazi Germany in WWII. “We really have a Maginot line. It is outflanked, overflowed, and infiltrated. And you know what happened to the French,” was his ominous evaluation of

⁷² Nevins, *Operation Gatekeeper and Beyond*, 64.

⁷³ Nevins, *Operation Gatekeeper and Beyond*, 64.

⁷⁴ Harry Bernstein, “Panel to Deal with Illegal Aliens Is Established by Administration.” *The Washington Post* (D.C., US), February 22, 1977.

the U.S. southern boundary⁷⁵. This vocabulary of war supported the growing public perception of the boundary as a battleground for upholding U.S. sovereignty. The interest in shoring up the boundary's defenses is ultimately a spatial symptom of anxiety over the subjective perception that domestic spaces, literal and metaphysical, were being taken over by foreign migrants. As Boano notes in his analysis of space, the socially constructed characterization of a space informs the ways in which that space is understood⁷⁶. By framing boundary space as the frontline of a cultural war for U.S. values, a physical war to preserve U.S. domestic territory from outsiders, and the final site of defense for both, these narratives furthered the concept of migrant crossers as threats to U.S. society.

The socially fabricated crisis of boundary security created a wealth of ideas about ways to repair “the sieve-like quality” of the U.S. southern boundary. In 1977, The Deputy Commissioner of the INS James Greene offered his ideas for boundary reform, all of which would change the spatial composition of the frontier. He recommended a strategy of preventing unsanctioned crossings by constructing, “a 10-foot-high chain-link fence in critical areas,” the addition of “8-10 spot-light equipped helicopters” to aid the solitary helicopter in use at the time, and an increase of at least 2,800 agents to aid the existing force of about 3,300⁷⁷. Americans from across the racial spectrum echoed this desire to shore up the nation's boundary against outsiders. In a segment of *the San Diego Reader* in 1977, locals answered the question, “How do you feel about the illegal alien situation?” Of the five persons quoted, only one expressed concern for the safety of

⁷⁵ Orr Kelly, "BORDER CRISIS; Illegal Aliens Out of Control." *U.S. News & World Report* (New York, NY), April 25, 1977, Special Report, 33.

⁷⁶ Boano, "'Violent spaces,'" 44.

⁷⁷ Kelly, "BORDER CRISIS," Special Report, 33.

migrants, the rest were an exercise in xenophobia. “Why should we take care of them?” said Jim Franchimone, whose sentiment of misused tax dollars was echoed by other interviewees. An interest in increased criminalization was another popular theme among answers, “I do think they [undocumented immigrants] should be punished somehow,” Mary Dunn said, while others thought that employers should be the target of law enforcement. Three out of the five pointed to interdiction as a solution: “Controls at the U.S. Mexican border should be tightened so that it would be harder for illegal aliens to enter the country,” said Deborah Coyne. All five answers regarded the “illegal alien situation” as one that required federal attention, intervention, and the application of order to chaos⁷⁸. San Diego residents were not alone in their racially informed anxiety. A New York City journalist remarked, in a piece entitled, “BORDER CRISIS; Illegal Aliens Out of Control,” that, “the U.S. has lost control of its borders”. Although he did not compare the boundary to WWII, he termed unauthorized migrants “invaders,” and described the number of encroaching Mexican migrants as “mushrooming”⁷⁹. In 1977, a national poll taken by the Roper Organization found that 91% of those who participated agreed that the country would benefit from an “all-out effort to stop the illegal entry into the United States of foreigners who don’t have visas”⁸⁰. U.S. officers at the boundary were painted as noble, but weary warriors, the last men standing between U.S. society and a free fall into foreign invasion. In 1972, the *Los Angeles Times* wrote, “holding the line against the tide of illegal entrants are 350 U.S. Customs Immigration and Border Patrol officers”⁸¹.

⁷⁸ “Off the Cuff.” *The San Diego Reader* (San Diego, CA), April 6, 1977, 5.

⁷⁹ Kelly, “BORDER CRISIS,” Special Report, 33.

⁸⁰ Christopher Dickey, and Chris Schauble. “U.S. Shelves Illegal Alien Search Policy; U.S. Ends Illegal Alien Search Policy; Stress Placed on Greater Border Security,” *The Washington Post* (D.C., US), November 5, 1978, A1.

⁸¹ Patiño, *Raza Sí, Migra No*, 93.

The military idea of “holding the line” against an invading force remained a popular idea, and as recently as October of 2018 President Trump called an approaching caravan of refugees an “invasion,” tweeting, “This is an invasion of our Country and our Military is waiting for you!”⁸².

INS’ federally sanctioned war on human mobility across the U.S. and its boundaries continued, but its efforts to gain control were complicated by the fruits of the civil rights movement of the 1960s. INS Commissioner Leonel Castillo, appointed in 1977 and the first Mexican-American man to hold the office, shifted the agency’s focus to the southern frontier. In an interview with *The Washington Post* in 1978, he revealed that the organization’s resources had largely been diverted “toward attempts to make the border more secure” rather than “aggressively searching out illegal aliens” already within the country⁸³. This shift in policy demonstrates the increasing concerns over controlling U.S.-Mexico boundary space, but also reflects the changing judicial landscape. “It makes more sense to have a strategy of prevention,” Castillo told the interviewer, particularly in light of court decisions made after the Civil Rights movement that began to penalize the INS for some of its methods⁸⁴. Whereas in 1954, “Officers were assigned to cover areas of dense population of Mexican descent to question suspected wetbacks,”⁸⁵ such blatant racial discrimination was becoming less acceptable in at least some federal courtrooms. In October of 1978, a federal court in D.C. ruled that the “use of a search warrant in a raid on Blackie’s House of Beef was illegal,” since the INS’ officers sought to make

⁸² Jordan Fabian, "Trump: Migrant caravan 'is an invasion,'" *The Hill* (D.C., US), October 29, 2018.

⁸³ Dickey and Schauble, "U.S. Shelves Illegal Alien Search Policy..." A1.

⁸⁴ Dickey and Schauble, "U.S. Shelves Illegal Alien Search Policy..." A1.

⁸⁵ "400 More Wetbacks Rounded Up." *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, CA), June 19, 1954, Local News. 1 and 7.

arrests rather than discover evidence. This ruling was, in Castillo's words, "an indicator of the trend of judicial decisions that all point to making it harder to stop people on the street"⁸⁶. In other words, harder to stop people who appeared to have Mexican ancestry, or, as happened in the mass deportations of the 1930s and '50s, send those same people across the southern boundary irrespective of citizenship. Castillo's colleagues accepted the judicial move to lessen racial profiling and other questionable INS methods with less grace, and *The Washington Post* reported that, "at one INS district office last week [late October, 1978] three investigators in separate interviews, referred to the Mexican-American Castillo as 'that wetback we have for a commissioner,'"⁸⁷. The same article notes that INS staff "morale is at an all-time low," in light of the new restrictions on their jurisdiction and activities, as dictated by both the courts and Castillo. J.B. Hillard, then president of the INS Council remarked, "As far as I'm concerned, we're drowning and have been for several years. I said a few years ago it's like trying to bail out the Queen Mary with a teacup. It's like it's down to a thimble now"⁸⁸. Hillard's analogy captured the frustration felt by many INS employees, and even members of the public. His angst however, was merely symptomatic of the U.S. conflict of interest at the boundary. While the policies discussed above sought to regulate human mobility and limit immigration, the U.S. was simultaneously interested in maintaining a malleable boundary in terms of its own economic opportunity. The INS then, was expected to somehow both seal the boundary yet leave it open to the right sort of migrants and money.

⁸⁶ Dickey and Schauble, "U.S. Shelves Illegal Alien Search Policy..." A1.

⁸⁷ Dickey and Schauble, "U.S. Shelves Illegal Alien Search Policy..." A1.

⁸⁸ Dickey and Schauble, "U.S. Shelves Illegal Alien Search Policy..." A1.

In another interview in 1979, Commissioner Castillo outlined the frustrations of other interested parties. He explained that, “The United Farm Workers called to complain that Mexican nationals are being brought in as strikebreakers. They want us to do something, build a fence, anything,”⁸⁹. Other, more extremist groups, also wanted the Commissioner’s ear. Castillo reminisced about an incident with an audience member after a speech he’d given, “this guy comes up to me, crew cut and necktie. He sticks out his hand and I shake it. He says, ‘I’m from the Ku Klux Klan and we’d like to offer you our help.’ ... You can’t believe the people who want to help us,”⁹⁰. Yet for all the people who desired some sort of physical barrier, or greater interdiction force, at the boundary, Castillo reflected that no U.S. citizens were eager to do the menial jobs often held by migrants. He referenced the Swiss referendum on foreign laborers, suggesting a similar litmus test might benefit the U.S. “The election there was very heated, very emotional, very racist. Yet the people voted overwhelmingly in favor of letting them stay. They just couldn’t imagine running their restaurants and so on without these folks”⁹¹.

Commissioner Castillo’s insights into the dialectic nature of boundary control, with desire for labor and the open market on one hand in contrast to an emphasis on control, went unheeded. In the late 1970s, Congress approved funds for the building of new barriers along the boundary with Mexico to replace the pathetic remains of chain link fences, that by this time were riddled with holes made by crossers undeterred by its presence. Set to cover about 27 out of the nearly 2,000 miles of the boundary in question,

⁸⁹ Henry Allen, "The Border Battles of Commissioner Castillo." *The Washington Post* (D.C., US), April 18, 1979, B1.

⁹⁰ Allen, "The Border Battles of Commissioner Castillo," B1.

⁹¹ Barbara Matusow, "Leonel Castillo INS' Man in the Middle," *Oakland Post* (Oakland, CA), July 17, 1979, 1.

this building project was nicknamed the “Tortilla Curtain,”⁹² and naturally, suffered the same hole cutting as its predecessors shortly after its construction⁹³. *The Washington Post* reported in 1978 that, “INS figures the new fence would force would be border-crossers to the ends of the fences, into open rural areas, where buried electronic sensors—relics of the Vietnam War—would alert the Border Patrol to their movement”⁹⁴. This spatially informed plan foreshadowed the strategies of the 1990s, which similarly sought to manipulate boundary spaces to the benefit of U.S. agents by displacing human traffic to more vulnerable geographic areas. Furthermore, as seen in Castillo’s comment about “prevention,” this era gives way to the rise of the boundary barrier as a viable solution. In the past, fences had been small scale and easily circumvented, but the late 1970s began to play with leftover military technology from the Vietnam War to enhance its efforts. The advent of the “Tortilla Curtain” also furthers the narrative of boundary space as a final line of defense against threatening outsiders, and a narrative in which U.S. agents fight crime and lawlessness.

Anxiety over boundary space, and its supposedly dangerous lack of regulation, continued to build in the 1980s. In 1983, a journalist for the *San Diego Reader* lamented an increased wait time for cars trying to cross the boundary, but assured readers that entertainment was at least provided in the form of watching “Mexican nationals clambering over the metal fence next to the pedestrian walkway back into the United States. Once over the fence, even in broad daylight, the aliens can scurry off

⁹² Ward Sinclair, "U.S. and Mexico Embroiled in Dispute Over "Tortilla Curtain," *The Washington Post* (D.C., US), December 24, 1978.

⁹³ Ramón Eduardo Ruiz, *On the Rim of Mexico: Encounters of the Rich and Poor* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000), 156, Digital file.

⁹⁴ Sinclair, "U.S. and Mexico Embroiled..."

undetected”⁹⁵. This image of a boundary so porous that “aliens” could escape official scrutiny with ease and evade any immediate threat of interdiction, even right beside an official Border Patrol entry station as in this scenario, fed an increasing public understanding of the U.S. government as uninterested and incapable of controlling its own sovereign territory. These observations also fed perceptions of migrants as persons without respect for the law, and the boundary itself as a site for crime.

The rise of the Chicano movement in the 1960s gave way to a distinct socio-spatial analysis of the frontier. The Chicano movement rejected the idea of cultural assimilation, and instead adopted an identity focused on territorial ancestry and social history. Activists were interested in the right to self-determination, challenging racist stereotypes of the Mexican-American, and rediscovering personal identity within the context of straddling two nations and two cultures. The movement addressed a range of civil and human rights concerns⁹⁶. Tejana (Texan) Chicana activist Emma Tenayuca, articulated a socio-spatial analysis of the Mexican and Mexican-American deportations of the 1930s by arguing that Mexican citizens held “historical rights in the territory” that had once belonged to Mexico “regardless of their citizenship”⁹⁷. The Chicano movement echoed this assertion by identifying, “Aztlán as the territorial homeland of Chicanos”⁹⁸. Aztlán, located in the southwestern region of what is now the U.S., is comprised of territory that once belonged to the indigenous populations, and then briefly to the

⁹⁵ J. D., “Will New Wall be Built to Scale?” *The San Diego Reader* (San Diego, CA), March 24, 1983.

⁹⁶ Patiño, *Raza Sí, Migra No*, 27.

⁹⁷ Patiño, *Raza Sí, Migra No*, 47.

⁹⁸ Patiño, *Raza Sí, Migra No*, 170.

Mexican Republic before the redrawing of the boundary in 1848. The name Aztlán references the mythological place of origin of the Aztec people. Poet, scholar, and activist Gloria Anzaldúa addressed the question of frontier space on a personal level in her 1987 book *Borderlands/La Frontera: the new mestiza*. She termed the boundary itself a “1,950 mile-long open wound / dividing a pueblo, a culture”⁹⁹. On the subject of territorial heritage she writes, “This land was Mexican once / was Indian always / and is. / And will be again”¹⁰⁰. This nod to indigeneity, seen here and in the idea of Aztlán, was important to the movement, as it emphasized not only an inherent right to exist in the space, but also a unique cultural heritage, and a people who had suffered the violent methods of Anglo-colonization for decades yet survived. The movement ultimately sought to address Chicano history and culture, and regain control of both from the insulting narratives or complete ignorance of Anglo-Americans. In addressing the history of colonization through discussions of civil rights and culture, the movement analyzed the experience of becoming part of a country not by choice, but by conquest.

Despite the consciousness-raising efforts and revelations wrought by the Chicano movement, the mainstream news could not bring itself to regard the history of U.S. as one of conquest, nor boundary control as a product of that legacy. The *Los Angeles Times* published an article in 1981 entitled, “U.S. Border Patrol: A Portrait of a Service Under Siege,” in which journalist Paul Dean detailed his experience trailing agents at the boundary near San Ysidro in San Diego. He describes various incidents at the boundary, all of which portray the agents as good men doing their best despite dreadful odds. In one

⁹⁹ Gloria E. Anzaldúa, and Sonia Saldivar-Hull, *Borderlands: The New Mestiza = La Frontera*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Books, 1999), 24.

¹⁰⁰ Anzaldúa and Sonia Saldivar-Hull, *Borderlands: The New Mestiza*, 25.

incident, he describes a Border Patrol helicopter downed by a thrown rock, and “its two occupants were stoned by a Mexican mob of 300”. He uses military language, describing the officers as “defenders,” who, “are outnumbered, surrounded, undersupplied”. According to Dean, his boundary protagonists stand alone in their efforts, he writes that, “Mexican officials...do nothing but receive and turn loose” the Mexican citizens delivered to them as criminals by the U.S. Border Patrol. Dean’s glorification of the U.S. Border Patrol aside, his foray into their organization reveals a few socio-spatial constructions in the frontier at the time. “That sand bar over there is called Fantasy Island,” explained Border Patrol agent Swartz, “The whole area between port and beach is Disneyland South.”¹⁰¹ These made-up names for specific parts of boundary geography exemplify the relationship between spaces and the ways in which perception of a given area becomes part of that space’s definition. By using terms like “Fantasy” and “Disney,” each of which convey a sort of innocent hope, and yet also the threat of disillusionment as both terms are associated with fiction, reveals the caustic prejudice at work on a socio-spatial level among Border Patrol agents. The Border Patrol’s jaded sense of humor informed the naming of Swartz’ home base, or “border station”—a converted San Diego Police Department building near San Ysidro. “He [Swartz] gets ready to leave the station, past holding cells now holding aliens and through a door where the majority of traffic is incoming, heavy and illegal. There’s an ink and paper sign taped over that door. It says “Hogar Dulce Hogar””. The naming of the station’s office and prison cell area as “Home Sweet Home,” reflects the caustic attitude of many agents interviewed in the article, particularly as they wrote it in Spanish, a language likely spoken by many of the migrants

¹⁰¹ Paul Dean, "U.S. Border Patrol: A Portrait of a Service Under Siege," *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, CA), November 1, 1981.

in the holding cells described¹⁰². At a San Clemente border station hung another taped sign that read, “Every nightmare has a beginning...this one never ends”¹⁰³. Dean does not identify whose nightmare the sign refers to, but the tone of the article suggests that it might be that of the Border Patrol agents themselves, whose efforts to police the boundary appear endless and ineffective. However, the captured migrants might lay greater claim to nightmarish experience, as many suffered humiliation and worse at the hands of the Border Patrol¹⁰⁴. The immense drama allocated to the boundary in this article, and others like it, develops a story of an abandoned U.S. federal law enforcement agency, left alone to defend its country. Such narratives left the U.S. government looking inattentive, and impotent. These stories of the Border Patrol “under siege” further perpetuate the myth that with enough funding, with enough technology, with enough agents, with enough *force*, the U.S. could successfully simultaneously close the border to the crossings of unwanted persons while leaving it open to “legal” persons and economic opportunity.

While rooted in the legacy of racist discrimination against Mexicans, and those presumed to have Mexican ancestry, Anglo-American xenophobia sharpened with the economic recessions of the 1970s, 80s, and 90s¹⁰⁵. The proportion of Mexican migrants within the larger population expanded substantially during this period as well, rising from approximately 54,000 recorded persons in 1950, to 760,000 in 1970, and an estimated 2.2

¹⁰² Dean, "U.S. Border Patrol..."

¹⁰³ Dean, "U.S. Border Patrol..."

¹⁰⁴ Patiño, *Raza Sí, Migra No*, 88 and 89.

¹⁰⁵ Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007), 42, digital file.

million by 1980¹⁰⁶. In California, the year 1973 marked the shift from what had, since the earlier displacement and massacre of indigenous populations, once been a predominantly Anglo-American area, to a region where non-Anglo persons were the majority¹⁰⁷. Author Ruth W. Gilmore posits that the economic recessions of the 1970s constituted a “historical turn” for the state of California that allowed for a rearrangement of state systems by powerful factions “rising from the Sunbelt, including California’s governor Ronald Reagan and U.S. President Nixon”. These men, and others like them, “began to propose “law and order” as the appropriate response to domestic insecurity, whatever its root causes”¹⁰⁸. The “domestic insecurity” in this case, likely refers to the widespread discontentment with the U.S. concerning the country’s involvement in the Vietnam War. Evidence of this political strategy to reimagine the Southwest’s economic structure without a social safety net reappeared with the recession in 1990. In the words of Gilmore, the 1990 economic slump “set the stage for more deliberately undoing the welfare state,” the consequences of which disproportionately affected people of color and the poor¹⁰⁹. She also highlights the political undermining of labor organizing, which further disadvantaged a working class that had already suffered unemployment as a result of de-industrialization. The subjective experience of the U.S. poor then, was one that felt betrayed by the state, and saw the foreign migrant as a leech robbing them of deserved state benefits, and job opportunities.

¹⁰⁶ Patiño, Jimmy, *Raza Sí, Migra No*, 90.

¹⁰⁷ Gilmore, *Golden Gulag*, 42.

¹⁰⁸ Gilmore, *Golden Gulag*, 40.

¹⁰⁹ Gilmore, *Golden Gulag*, 44.

Arguments for barring migrants from schools and welfare services emerged alongside discussions of tightening boundary control. Texas in particular struggled over the question of whether or not to offer public education to the children of migrants. A U.S. District judge had already ruled against a Texas law from 1975, which barred the use of state funds to educate “alien children”. However, by 1980, Texas officials had pursued the case all the way to the Supreme Court, arguing that a “stay was necessary to avoid irreparable harm to school districts” that would supposedly be crippled by the legal complications presented by such a decision. These alleged struggles would then end up “lowering the quality of education provided”. Despite protests from Texas politicians, the school districts in question assured a journalist that they were prepared to receive more students, and that the quality of education would not change¹¹⁰. Author Jimmy Patiño notes that Anglo concerns over migrant access to state benefits was particularly racist and gendered post 1965. He describes the strip-search suffered by a woman in January of 1972, and writes that combined with the questions recorded by the INS officer, this incident revealed, “the perspective held by the INS that Mexican women in particular were threats to the well-being of the nation”¹¹¹. Women were suspect for the usual reasons such as being possible welfare receivers, job stealers, or purveyors of illegal substances, but worse, they held the potential to reproduce an unwanted population. Consequently, immigrant women’s bodies were a dangerous sign of population growth, and the concomitant need for health care, education, and other social services¹¹².

¹¹⁰ Richard Carelli, "Texas Ordered to Educate Illegal Alien Children," *Associated Press* (D.C., US), September 4, 1980, Washington D.C., Dateline.

¹¹¹ Patiño, *Raza Sí, Migra No*, 102.

¹¹² Patiño, *Raza Sí, Migra No*, 103.

Immigrants of Mexican ancestry, though perhaps the most visible in mainstream news coverage, were not the U.S.' only concern. Within the context of the Cold War, the U.S. government had sought as many international allies for their anti-communist ideology as possible. In Central and South America, this translated into U.S. backing of violent military dictatorships throughout the 1970s and '80s. The result was a toxic paradox in which the U.S. government portrayed their country as a beacon of freedom and a messianic source of Western progress, whilst simultaneously funding and training a violent suppression of the left in Central and South American countries¹¹³. The following civil wars and political upheavals generated both internal migrations within the affected countries, but also an increase in immigrations to the U.S. to escape the violence. Central American migration to the U.S. picked up in the 1970s, but grew exponentially during the 1980s, when statistics estimate a 231.5% increase in Central American immigration to the U.S. Official counts from the U.S. government found that El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua were among the top countries of origin during this time¹¹⁴. Scholars agree that these immigration trends were rooted in the need to escape the terror and destitution wrought by civil wars, wars that were often funded or manipulated by agents of U.S. government. U.S. foreign policy essentially created the increase in immigration, and in doing so produced their own villain, the so-called immigration "crisis" that mainstream news outlets were so concerned about. The result was anxiety surrounding ideas of defending the U.S.' national identity, sovereign space, and public resources. Consequently, regaining control of the boundary began to symbolize regaining

¹¹³ Stephen G. Rabe, *The Killing Zone: The United States Wages Cold War in Latin America*, 3rd ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012), 114, 115, 144, 145, and 156.

¹¹⁴ Alisa Gani, "Mechanisms of Migration: Poverty and Social Instability in the Postwar Expansion of Central American Migration to the United States," *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies* 8, no. 3 (August 25, 2010): 317.

control of those allegedly threatened areas by a growing (predominantly white) section of the electorate.

U.S. legislators sought a solution with the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986. This law sought to penalize employers caught hiring undocumented persons, and reformed immigration control and applications for legal residence, among other mandates. Before the bill was passed, a *New York Times* editorial supported it, writing that the U.S. needed to “regain control [of the country’s] borders”. U.S. Attorney General Edwin Meese felt similarly, noting that there was a “definite link” between immigration and drug smuggling¹¹⁵. Immigrant’s rights organizations protested vehemently, and in San Francisco the Committee to Defend Immigrant and Refugee Rights picketed the Federal building, chanting, “Unemployment and inflation are not caused by immigration”¹¹⁶. Other protesters argued that the new sanctions against employers of “illegal aliens” would lead to discrimination against anyone mistaken for an undocumented laborer, which is to say people of color who appear “foreign” or persons with accents¹¹⁷. However, as Commissioner Castillo astutely observed back in 1979, the lasting dilemma of the U.S. remained: by setting unrealistic quotas on the Mexican labor force, and then failing to hire sufficient persons to process migrant applications or “seal” the boundary, the U.S. was essentially, “running the largest unregulated, unsupervised, temporary worker program in the world”¹¹⁸.

¹¹⁵ Harrison Laird, "Immigration Bill Passes," *Asian Week* (San Francisco, CA), October 17, 1986, 1.

¹¹⁶ Laird, "Immigration Bill Passes."

¹¹⁷ Laird, "Immigration Bill Passes."

¹¹⁸ Matusow, "Leonel Castillo INS' Man in the Middle," 1.

The Boundary Reimagined

The socio-culturally inspired drama regarding the U.S.-Mexico boundary built to a formidable crescendo through the latter half of the 20th century, resulting in the policies of the mid '90s that changed the spatial composition of the U.S.-Mexico boundary. The significant increase in boundary construction and policing seen in the 1990s seems contradictory in light of the supposed globalization of economies, and negotiations regarding the North American Free Trade Agreement taking place at the same time. The effort to solidify the boundary in the early '90s, what Nevins' terms the U.S. "nation-state-building project," and its associated perpetuation of the "illegal" migrant developed a socio-geographically distinct version of the boundary¹¹⁹. While Border Patrol Operations of the early 90s sought to eradicate boundary-related illegal activities, they simultaneously immortalized the presence of those same activities. By establishing legal and illegal spaces for persons, the Border Patrol preserved the existence of illegality in the frontier. In the effort to heighten the INS' ability to control movement across the U.S.-Mexico boundary, these operations essentially furthered the institutionalization of the boundary—both physically and ideologically.

The economic recession of 1990 hit southern California with particular force,¹²⁰ which some scholars feel explains the sudden political interest in the U.S.-Mexico boundary. However, it is difficult to attribute the emergence of boundary operations in El Paso, and later in San Ysidro (San Diego) to any particular event. To attribute Anglo-xenophobia entirely to economic proceedings, as though racism were the natural result of a fiscal challenge seems illogical. More likely, the subjective experience of the Anglo-

¹¹⁹ Nevins, *Operation Gatekeeper and Beyond*, 10.

¹²⁰ Gilmore, *Golden Gulag*, 50.

American, informed by increasingly dramatic media coverage of the “illegal alien problem,” and the apparent failure of 1986’s Immigration Reform and Control Act, led the electorate in California toward a restrictionist ideology¹²¹. Historian Ramón Eduardo Ruiz argues that to consider Tijuana and San Diego “twin cities,” as many conceive of El Paso and its neighbor Ciudad Juárez, would be inaccurate. “San Diegans never think of themselves as living in a border town...San Diegans have prided themselves on being Anglos and Protestants, though they delight in bestowing Spanish names on their streets”¹²². He goes on to call their relationship to Mexican culture a “fling,”¹²³ a term that successfully captures the Anglo understanding of sharp social difference between themselves and the Mexican “other”. In spite of the evidence provided by a Rand study in 1991, which concluded that, ““immigrants do not cause adverse economic effects for native born workers,” since they generally do not compete for the same kinds of jobs held by persons born here,”¹²⁴ the characterization of the migrant as a threat to the American social fabric persisted. The caricature of the foreigner as inherently hazardous to Anglo-society was compounded after the multiracial uprising in Los Angeles in late April of 1992. Following the mistrial and not-guilty verdicts for the group of policemen who had assaulted African American Rodney King, the city erupted into a rebellion with more casualties than the Watt’s Riots of 1965. Upwards of fifty people perished, sixteen thousand were arrested, and \$1 billion was lost in property damages. In the aftermath,

¹²¹ Nevins, *Operation Gatekeeper and Beyond*, 84.

¹²² Ruiz, *On the Rim of Mexico*, 31.

¹²³ Ruiz, *On the Rim of Mexico*, 31

¹²⁴ Curt Suplee, "Mexican Immigrants' 'Shift to Permanence,'" *The Washington Post* (D.C., US), March 26, 1991, National News, A15.

Lynn Itagaki writes that, “More than a thousand were deported, most to Mexico”¹²⁵. Those who suffered the greatest consequences, such as homelessness, unemployment, and death were disproportionately persons of color¹²⁶. Apart from protesting police brutality and intense poverty, the violence of the five-day rebellion served to shake Anglo confidence in the stability of their communities, and challenged their hegemonic control.

While the volume had been turned up on the immigration question since the late 1970s, politicians in the 1990s sought to gain voters and boost their platforms with a hard stance on “illegal” migrants in response to the latest wave of anti-immigrant sentiment. Perhaps loudest among them was Republican California governor Pete Wilson. In 1991, Wilson blamed California’s \$12.6 billion deficit on both legal and illegal migrants, arguing that each had contributed to the state’s economic crisis¹²⁷. In a November interview that same year, he referred to California’s welfare benefits as a “magnet” for unauthorized migrants and the poor¹²⁸. Wilson urged the federal government to offset the costs of undocumented migrants in the state of California, as he blamed the government for its inability to control the boundary and limit immigration¹²⁹. Wilson’s Republican colleagues soon joined in on the fun, complaining that the federal government’s impotence at the boundary required immediate funding and reinforcement. In October 1991, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that Representative Elton Gallegly (R-Simi Valley, CA) had introduced a bill that would deny citizenship to the children of “illegal

¹²⁵ Lynn Mie Itagaki, *Civil Racism: The 1992 Los Angeles Rebellion and the Crisis of Racial Burnout* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 2.

¹²⁶ Itagaki, *Civil Racism*, 2.

¹²⁷ Sharon Spivak, “Wilson Blames Budget Woes on Unchecked Immigration,” *The San Diego Tribune*, April 12, 1991, A-1.

¹²⁸ Henry Muller and John F. Stacks, “Wilson Decries State’s Welfare Magnetism.” *The San Diego Tribune*, November 11, 1991, A-1.

¹²⁹ Nevins, *Operation Gatekeeper and Beyond*, 85.

immigrants”. The bill was heavily criticized as racist, and a ploy to attract Anglo voters. As Dr. Margaret Cortese, the President of El Concilio (an advocacy group), noted, “Gallegly exploits the rigidity of people threatened by pluralism”¹³⁰ Republican Pat Buchanan called for a wall stretching the length of the boundary in 1992, while others sought to strengthen the federal government’s power to build access roads and fences in the frontier, irrespective of private property holder’s desires¹³¹. While these policies did not triumph in the 1992 elections, the U.S. Navy and army reserves did build a barrier (parts of which are still in place) that stretched for fourteen miles of the San Diego boundary, and reached 10 feet high. This 1992 structure was composed of a variety of materials, including some leftover steel from the Vietnam War. The fence even extends about 340 feet into the ocean to discourage those with a mind to just swim across the divide¹³². The *Los Angeles Times* noted, “With the newly installed floodlights that run nearly the entire length of the fence, the wall resembles the edge of a prison camp”¹³³.

Despite the continued complaints of Republicans in the early 1990s, unauthorized immigration did not garner sincere Presidential attention until 1993. The continued economic recession, combined with a series of well-publicized incidents regarding undocumented migrants led to a sudden crescendo of local and national calls for boundary control. Bill Clinton and incumbent President George H.W. Bush had argued over what to do about the influx of Haitian refugees expected to flee to the U.S. from the oppressive regime on the island. The Bush administration practiced interdiction, and

¹³⁰ Santiago O'Donnell, "Angry Latino Leaders Decry Gallegly Proposal," *The Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, CA), October 21, 1991, Politics.

¹³¹ Nevins, *Operation Gatekeeper and Beyond*, 86.

¹³² Ruiz, *On the Rim of Mexico*, 157.

¹³³ Ruiz, *On the Rim of Mexico*, 157.

although Clinton at first promised to discontinue forced repatriations, he soon overturned his stance. As the *New York Times* put it, “Clinton’s official explanation for reversing himself is to avoid the humanitarian catastrophe of capsized boats and overcrowded camps...But Mr. Clinton’s real worry appears to be political fallout” in key electoral states that would be affected by “a flood of poor black Haitian refugees”¹³⁴. Other events involving immigrants also gained national notoriety. In late February of 1993 the World Trade Center in New York was bombed, allegedly by a group of unauthorized migrant men¹³⁵. Later that same year, an undocumented Pakistani assassinated two agents of the Central Intelligence Agency in Virginia¹³⁶. While unrelated to Mexico, its people, or the southern boundary of the U.S., these incidents nonetheless informed the Anglo-public’s understanding of migrants as dangerous individuals liable to attack American institutions and values. Perhaps the most dramatically received incident occurred in early June of 1993. A freighter ship, the *Golden Venture*, was found off the coast of New York City with “more than 200” unauthorized Chinese migrants aboard. *The Washington Post* reported that the influx of unauthorized migrants had “exploded” in recent years, and that “with the surge in immigration has come violence”, although the paper failed to break down any statistical evidence of who was responsible for the violence mentioned¹³⁷. As author Peter Kwong noted, “the story of the *Golden Venture* became a national

¹³⁴ Norman L. Zucker and Naomi Flink Zucker, *Desperate Crossings: Seeking Refuge in America* (London, UK: Routledge, 2016), 114.

¹³⁵ Pat Milton, "Trade Center Plotters May Have Left U.S.," *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, March 6, 1993, A-1.

¹³⁶ James Popkin, and Dorian Friedman, "Return To Sender—Please," *U.S. News and World Report*, June 21, 1993, 32.

¹³⁷ Malcolm Gladwell, and Rachel E. Stassen-Berger, "HUMAN CARGO IS HUGELY PROFITABLE TO NEW YORK'S CHINESE UNDERWORLD," *The Washington Post* (D.C., US), June 7, 1993.

obsession...every television station and newspaper around the country carried its own investigation” into the incident¹³⁸. In light of the high profile coverage of these events and the Anglo-American tradition of racism, the national conversation turned increasingly toward “illegal immigrants” as viable culprits for the social complaints of the time.

With Democrats occupying the White House under President Bill Clinton, Republicans heavily criticized the administration for its failings with respect to the U.S.-Mexico boundary. In August 1993, Pete Wilson made his frustrations known by purchasing a full-page advertisement in the *New York Times*, which featured his “open letter” to Clinton and his administration “on behalf of the people of California.” He wrote, “MASSIVE ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION WILL CONTINUE AS LONG AS THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT CONTINUES TO REWARD IT. WHY EVEN HAVE A BORDER PATROL AND I.N.S IF WE ARE GOING TO CONTINUE THE INSANITY OF PROVIDING INCENTIVES TO ILLEGAL MIGRANTS TO VIOLATE U.S. IMMIGRATION LAWS?” (capitalization included in the original text)¹³⁹. While Pete Wilson was perhaps the most theatrical, other Congressional candidates, Democrats included, scrambled to put forth their own tough positions on the “illegal” problem in time for the 1994 elections. California Senator Dianne Feinstein (a Democrat) proposed a \$1 entry fee on all Mexican border crossings to help fund the Border Patrol, while her colleague Senator Barbara Boxer (another California Democrat) suggested that the

¹³⁸ Peter Kwong, Introduction to *Forbidden Workers: Illegal Chinese Immigrants and American Labor* (New York, NY: New Press, 1998), 2.

¹³⁹ Pete Wilson, “Why Does The U.S. Government Continue to Reward Illegal Immigration...At Such Cost to the American People?” (Paid advertisement), *The New York Times*, August 10, 1993, A11.

National Guard deploy to aid Border Patrol agents¹⁴⁰. In November of 1994, just two years after the Los Angeles Rodney King riots, California voted yes on Proposition 187, which excluded unauthorized migrants from the state's social services, including education and healthcare¹⁴¹. The end of the Cold War hit the California economy with particular force, as without its associated emphasis on national defense, the state's dependence on military-industrial contracts became a liability¹⁴². The subjective experience of the white electorate was consequently colored by economic hardship, a rise in unemployment, and a weakened social safety net as a result of tax cuts. Although most of Proposition 187 was ultimately repealed as unconstitutional, its passage exemplifies the use of the migrant as a viable scapegoat for issues that were not in fact socio-cultural, but economic. The national narrative was one of a beleaguered U.S., under siege by foreign peoples, and lawmakers promised an anxious electorate greater boundary protection against these so-called "invaders".

In spite of these political promises, the Border Patrol Chief of the El Paso Texas sector, Silvestre Reyes, beat politicians to the punch with the launch of his unsanctioned experiment in boundary control in late 1993. On September 19th, Reyes assigned about 400 agents to a twenty mile stretch of the boundary, creating an obvious law enforcement presence that was further buoyed by the intensification of inspections at entry ports¹⁴³. Originally called Operation Blockade, the El Paso strategy would later be renamed Operation Hold-the-Line in an effort to minimize the offense felt by the Mexican

¹⁴⁰ Marcus Stern, "Boxer Urges National Guard Use at Border; Border Lures the Lawmakers," *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, July 30, 1993, A1; A3.

¹⁴¹ Nevins, *Operation Gatekeeper and Beyond*, 3.

¹⁴² Gilmore, *Golden Gulag*, 36 and 37.

¹⁴³ Nevins, *Operation Gatekeeper and Beyond*, 90.

government. Reyes' strategy, initially tested as a temporary measure, proved popular enough to inspire not just California policy, but national strategy. California politicians hailed Reyes' work in El Paso as the answer to their own boundary in San Diego, and local politicians continued to turn their ire on the Clinton administration over the "illegal immigrant"¹⁴⁴. Not long after Operation Hold-the-Line was implemented, the San Diego County Board of Supervisors voted to send a monthly bill to the White House so that they might be reimbursed for costs relating to undocumented immigration¹⁴⁵. In a tale of hypocrisy typical of U.S. efforts to control the boundary with Mexico while still reaping economic rewards from its international partnership with the same country, the Clinton administration was negotiating the terms of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) during this same time.

While the NAFTA was regarded at first as an agreement that would bolster Mexico's journey along the path of neoliberalism and progress, it ultimately served as a postcolonial tool for the U.S.' investors and companies to influence Mexico's economic structure, resulting in an unequal relationship of power¹⁴⁶. As Lennecke Schils notes in his analysis of the NAFTA's impact, the agreement has yet to achieve its promises of grand economic growth and the increase of both the number and quality of jobs available in Mexico. Instead, the agreement, "ha servido de puente para las multinacionales estadounidenses en México...El tratado ha sido diseñado por tecnócratas con grandes intereses comerciales, que descuidaron la inclusión de redes de seguridad para quienes

¹⁴⁴ Nevins, *Operation Gatekeeper and Beyond*, 90.

¹⁴⁵ Valerie Alvord, "County Sending Clinton Tab for Immigrants," *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, September 29, 1993, A-1.

¹⁴⁶ Lennecke Schils, "Una teoría postcolonial de México, Wal-Mart y la idea de progreso: La invasión de los wal-marcianos," *Espiral* 14, no. 41 (April 2008): 42.

resultaran perjudicados por la liberalización.”¹⁴⁷ Despite the NAFTA’s efforts to purportedly help Mexico, the supposedly liberal move to globalize economies did not aid the average Mexican national, and in fact displaced local markets, ultimately resulting in increased immigration north to the U.S. as people struggled to find work. What emerged, then, was an odd paradox in which the U.S. welcomed fiscal opportunity by opening up economic boundaries with Mexico, yet simultaneously sought to reinforce physical boundaries against Mexico and control human mobility at the political border.

Reyes’ Operation Hold-the-Line seemed to many the ideal tool to accomplish the U.S.’ contradictory aims of concurrently opening and sealing the boundary with Mexico. Shortly after Reyes’ experiment, INS employees penned the *Border Patrol Strategic Plan 1994 and Beyond: National Strategy*. The document outlines how, “through an infusion of permanent resources designed to stabilize their [the Border Patrol’s] enforcement initiative” agents would be able to extend control of the boundary throughout key popular crossing points¹⁴⁸. They termed their concept, “prevention through deterrence,” with the idea being that with an increase in agents, physical barriers, and improved technology, they could deter persons from even attempting to cross over into the U.S. If offered sufficient resources, they felt their plan could “achieve a rate of apprehensions sufficiently high to raise the risk of apprehension to the point that many will consider it futile to continue to attempt illegal entry”¹⁴⁹. Central to the Border Patrol’s new initiative,

¹⁴⁷ Schils , “Una teoría postcolonial,” 69. Quote translated: has served as a bridge for U.S. multinational corporations in Mexico... The agreement has been designed by technocrats with big commercial interests, who neglected to include safety nets for those who were ultimately injured by the liberalization.”

¹⁴⁸ U.S. Border Patrol. *Border Patrol Strategic Plan 1994 and Beyond: National Strategy*. U.S. Border Patrol, 1994, 7.

¹⁴⁹ U.S. Border Patrol, *Border Patrol Strategic Plan 1994 and Beyond*, 6.

apart from a dramatic increase in funding, was spatial manipulation. With the usual routes disrupted by a sudden mass presence of Border Patrol agents, “illegal traffic will be deterred, or forced over more hostile terrain, less suited for crossing and more suited for enforcement”¹⁵⁰. By creating an intimidating presence at the boundary line, the plan’s architects forced migrant traffic away from urban areas to rural spaces. The first phase of the plan focused its efforts on El Paso and San Diego, as they report, “the majority of illegal entries have historically occurred” in these areas¹⁵¹. However, after achieving “success” in these regions, the following phases would address other popular entrance corridors along the boundary, including other sites in Texas and Arizona. The proposed spatially strategic changes reflected the social hierarchy at work at the frontier. The document notes that new recruits to the Border Patrol are, “originally assigned to the southern border, and as a consequence build strong ties based on commonality of experience”¹⁵². This training method essentially instructs new agents in the dichotomy created by boundary enforcement efforts of ‘us’ and ‘them’. The “commonality of experience” referenced in the document operates along the lines of Sahlins’ “subjective experience”. The subjective experience in this scenario creates a law enforcement group in which all agents learn the legal/illegal binary out in the field, in a context in which they likely feel threatened by prospective crossers. In rearranging their strategy on a spatial level, the Border Patrol reinforced their hegemony, emphasized the social binary created by the boundary, and sought to intimidate would-be-migrants.

¹⁵⁰ U.S. Border Patrol, *Border Patrol Strategic Plan 1994 and Beyond*, 7.

¹⁵¹ U.S. Border Patrol, *Border Patrol Strategic Plan 1994 and Beyond*, 9.

¹⁵² U.S. Border Patrol, *Border Patrol Strategic Plan 1994 and Beyond*, 6.

The *Strategic Plan* of 1994 operates on a number of spatial levels. First, the effort to use space as an expression of the U.S. sovereign power, demonstrated by military language and reinforced by the endorsement of politicians involved in the project. Terms like “blockade” and “hold-the-line” for the Operation in El Paso reflect a militant attitude toward boundary crossings. Operation Gatekeeper, located in the San Diego sector, reflects the idea that boundary space was an unregulated “revolving door” in dire need of a lock. When U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno announced the Clinton administration’s endorsement of the plan in February 1994, she echoed President Clinton’s statement that, “America would not surrender her borders”. Terms like “surrender” served to portray the space as a social battleground, one that the U.S. was determined to win at any cost. Of her boundary tour in 1993, she remarked that, “we saw the high-stakes battles waged by our border patrol agents day in and day out”¹⁵³. This depiction of the long-suffering patrolmen fighting “dangerous” crossers is reminiscent of the press coverage of the ‘70s and ‘80s. Secondly, there is an emphasis throughout the document on *regaining* “control”—as if they once had it—when in fact the history of the boundary is one of free movement despite U.S. efforts to curb it. This sentiment is obvious in the document’s “Vision” statement, which reads, “The U.S. Border Patrol will control the borders of the United States...restoring our Nation’s confidence in the integrity of the border”¹⁵⁴. Efforts to reinforce U.S. sovereignty through the presence of persons or infrastructures along the boundary are spatial products of the social belief that Mexican migrants posed a threat to the U.S. The document also classifies statistics of unauthorized entry into the

¹⁵³ Janet Reno, Attorney General et. al., "News Conference with Attorney General Janet Reno and INS Commissioner Doris Meissner Topic: Illegal Immigration," speech, February 3, 1994, The United States Department of Justice Archives.

¹⁵⁴ U.S. Border Patrol, *Border Patrol Strategic Plan 1994 and Beyond*, 2.

country by place of origin, and notably uses the acronym “OTM” to refer to persons “Other Than Mexicans” caught crossing the boundary. This reveals the organization’s focus on the Mexican crosser as the primary threat to immigration law. The regular use of this term necessarily informs conceptions of boundary space, as it suggests that Mexican nationals commit the largest number of boundary related infractions, and consequently encourages perceptions of Mexican-illegality. The characterization of the dangerous unauthorized migrant and the perception of chaos in the frontier developed a narrative that fostered the production of physical changes to the U.S. southern boundary.

The changes outlined in the plan reimagined frontier spaces in ways that privileged one group over the other. The strategy sought to make certain areas of the boundary nearly impossible to cross, and thus direct foot traffic to more “hostile,” meaning more dangerous, regions. These newly strengthened measures offered the Border Patrol a tactical advantage. Cities allow for unauthorized migrants to disappear into crowds, or blend into established communities. With this new strategy, the Border Patrol sought to eradicate the frustration of searching for a needle in haystack, and avoid the public spectacle of chasing down crossers. Forcing crossings to areas so rural there would be little chance of “anonymity” or access to public transit made crossers more vulnerable to capture by the Border Patrol¹⁵⁵. The latter’s stated goal was “to increase the ‘cost’ to illegal entrants,” which, essentially, is diplomatic language for making crossing so dangerous to the individual that he or she will choose to cease attempting it¹⁵⁶. Crossers would now be forced through desolate mountains or desert terrain, areas lacking in lots of natural resources like food and water to sustain crossers. The plan took

¹⁵⁵ U.S. Border Patrol, *Border Patrol Strategic Plan 1994 and Beyond*, 9.

¹⁵⁶ U.S. Border Patrol, *Border Patrol Strategic Plan 1994 and Beyond*, 7.

advantage of the natural environment, “illegal entrants crossing through remote, uninhabited expanses of land and sea along the border can find themselves in mortal danger”¹⁵⁷. This strategy also made immigration less visible, as it shifted crossings to uninhabited expanses and largely eradicated the practice of agents sprinting after crossers in public spaces¹⁵⁸. This served to provide the illusion of successful border control, as without regular sightings of crossers the Border Patrol hoped for “improved public perception” of the boundary, as mainstream portrayals at the time regarded the lack of control as an example state impotence¹⁵⁹. However, crossings were not truly prevented or deterred by the strategy, as their slogan suggested, but were instead intentionally displaced to areas where migrants would be at a disadvantage. This calculated displacement is a spatial arrangement, which privileges law enforcement, reflects and reproduces the dichotomy of the foreign invader versus the righteous resident and the general anti-immigrant sentiment evident in mainstream culture and policy during the early 90s.

The *Strategic Plan* additionally exposes the perpetually reactive nature of boundary spaces. The authors note that crossers and smugglers are forever developing more sophisticated methods of bypassing the Border Patrol¹⁶⁰. In light of the fact that “illegal entry trends react quickly to border control initiatives,” the plan acknowledged that the strategy would have to be spatially malleable to allocate personnel and resources to specific areas of concern. In their words, “Sectors need to be protected from becoming

¹⁵⁷ U.S. Border Patrol, *Border Patrol Strategic Plan 1994 and Beyond*, 2.

¹⁵⁸ Jason De León, and Michael Wells. *The Land of Open Graves: Living and Dying on the Migrant Trail*. 2015. 63.

¹⁵⁹ U.S. Border Patrol, *Border Patrol Strategic Plan 1994 and Beyond*, 12.

¹⁶⁰ U.S. Border Patrol, *Border Patrol Strategic Plan 1994 and Beyond*, 3.

new ‘hot spots’ that are out of control”¹⁶¹. Despite a “concentration of resources on the line,” the plan allowed for “realignment of resources as entries shift”¹⁶². This contingency effectively institutionalized a reactive spatial exchange between agents and crossers. The barriers provide another site for reactive interchanges, as migrants cut into or under the fence in order to cross, and the Border Patrol then contracts repairmen to reinforce the breach. This process is ongoing, and as recently as 2016, the *San Diego Union-Tribune* ran an article that called boundary barrier repairs a costly “daily endeavor”¹⁶³.

Technological installations also form a part in the ever-changing composition of boundary spaces. The 1994 *Strategic Plan* proposed to augment and improve the use of technology at the boundary, “to maximize personnel and enhance mobility [,] flexibility...[and] monitor activity in Mexico – [to enhance] intelligence”¹⁶⁴.

Contemporary boundary controls, which trace their roots to this initiative and earlier installations of military-grade technology, include tools like cameras, infrared sensors, and drones to help police the boundary¹⁶⁵. Used in tandem with the physical presence of Border Patrol agents scattered along the boundary, this environment of intensive surveillance is reminiscent of Bentham’s Panopticon prison schema, in which the inmate is always seen yet never sees. Bentham’s Panopticon design, published in 1787, proposes a circular building that allows for the constant surveillance of the resident prisoners from

¹⁶¹ U.S. Border Patrol, *Border Patrol Strategic Plan 1994 and Beyond*, 6 and 7.

¹⁶² U.S. Border Patrol, *Border Patrol Strategic Plan 1994 and Beyond*, 8.

¹⁶³ Peter Rowe, "Repairing border wall a daily endeavor," *The San Diego Union-Tribune* (San Diego, CA), May 15, 2016.

¹⁶⁴ U.S. Border Patrol, *Border Patrol Strategic Plan 1994 and Beyond*, 13.

¹⁶⁵ Nixon, "On the Mexican Border, a Case for Technology Over Concrete."

a central point of observation¹⁶⁶. The panopticon's surveillance architecture, simulated by Border Patrol strategies beginning in the latter half of the 20th century, produces a disproportionate power dynamic, which privileges the observer. As Foucault notes in his analysis, the effect of this "state of conscious and permanent visibility... assures the automatic functioning of power"¹⁶⁷. The "automatic functioning of power" is sustained in two essential ways. First, as in the Border Patrol's proposed "show of force," the observation tower remains visible to the inmates at all times. This provides an enduring formidable expression of the unequal power dynamic at work. Second, the presence or absence of observation remains unverifiable, which induces in the inmate a state of perpetual uncertainty¹⁶⁸. The U.S.-Mexico boundary mimics this dynamic with its diverse range of barriers and tower structures offering obvious symbols of power. The use of surveillance technology at work along the boundary similarly creates an environment of ambiguity, in that the crosser is simultaneously aware of potential observation but unable to confirm it. In this way, boundary architectures, personnel, and technologies create spaces that physically and psychologically place the crosser at a disadvantage. The intended function of the Border Patrol's "prevention through deterrence" ideology reflects Foucault's analysis of the automatic functioning of power, as it relies on the belief that the migrant will regard the boundary law enforcement apparatus with enough fear to discourage them from attempting to cross. However, its impossible to say whether

¹⁶⁶ Jeremy Bentham and Miran Bozovic, *The Panopticon Writings*, 2011 ed. (London, UK: Verso, 1995), 35.

¹⁶⁷ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 2012 ed. (New York, NY: Random House US, 1995), 201.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 201

or not the migrant actually internalizes the feeling of surveillance as Foucault suggests occurs within the Panopticon structure without further anthropological investigation.

The restructuring of the boundary came at great federal cost, but also offered Democratic politicians the opportunity to prove that they were not “soft” on crime or boundary control. In a press conference in February 1994, INS Commissioner Doris Meissner explained that, “the INS added \$172.5 million to the INS budget in FY ’94. Today’s announcement represents an enhancement of 368 million for FY ’95”¹⁶⁹. That represents a twenty-two percent increase in their budget from 1994 to 1995. Their budget would increase again in 1996, by nearly twenty-five percent¹⁷⁰. Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) asserted that, “the time has come that we’re going to enforce our borders in America,” and explained that the plan would ultimately increase “the number of agents on active enforcement duty...by more than 40 percent in calendar year 1994”. Commissioner Meissner called the strategy, “a full reinventing of the INS,” while Representative Mazzoli (D-KY) expressed the new measures as an effort to support legal avenues of immigration and limit human rights offenses. “You not only obviously have to retain control of your border,” he said, “but when you keep people from coming in illegally, you drop off virtually to zero all of the allegations, founded or unfounded, of mistreatment, of civil rights abuses, and all the other things that sometimes come from our agents being out in the dark in dangerous situations chasing people around”¹⁷¹. What Mazzoli fails to explain is that the “drop off” is owed to displacing crossings to desolate,

¹⁶⁹ Reno et. al., "News Conference," speech, The United States Department of Justice Archives.

¹⁷⁰ Francisco Robles, "Imposible pacto migratorio dada la xenofobia en EU: Las leyes actuales contra los indocumentados son de largo alcance, sostiene el gobierno mexicano," *La Opinión* (Los Angeles, CA), August 25, 1996, 1A.

¹⁷¹ Reno et. al., "News Conference," speech, The United States Department of Justice Archives.

inhospitable regions. Policymakers could now attribute a range of migrant troubles to the physical environment rather than the laws that made those environmental conditions a viable alternative to the crosser. If starvation, dehydration, wild animals, and exposure captured migrants before the patrolmen did, nature would conveniently take responsibility for the abuse.

Unsurprisingly, Latinos were not quiescent about these developments at the boundary. As one Mexican-American journalist wrote in a piece published in the Texas newspaper *El Sol*, “En todas estas presupuestas el “enemigo” al que hay que atacar es la gente mexicana...se les debe impedir la entrada, y si logran entrar, se les debe expulsar o castigar si se quedan. Este es un insulto”¹⁷². Apart from the insulting racial discrimination associated with the increased criminalization of crossers, and augmented law enforcement at the boundary, others criticized U.S. policy for putting migrants in danger. In 1996, by which time Operations Hold-the-line and Gatekeeper had been in place for at least two years, the Cónsul General Mexicano Ramón Xilotl concluded in an interview that “no van a desanimar la inmigración, lo que van a hacerla es más peligrosa”¹⁷³. A Mexican news outlet ran a story in 1998 entitled, “Medidas de control migratorio de la Patrulla Fronteriza han tenido impacto contrario”. Essentially, in its effort to stop “illegal” crossings, the Border Patrol’s new strategy inspired permanent migrants rather than the old pattern of temporary migrants who came to work for a while before returning

¹⁷² Christopher D. Cameron, "Reformas migratorias, insulto a los ciudadanos de origen mexicano," *El Sol de Texas* (Dallas, TX), July 13, 1995, 8. Quote translated: “All of this presupposes that the ‘enemy’ to attack is the Mexican people...They should be prevented from entering, and if they succeed in entering, they should be thrown out or punished if they stay. This is an insult.”

¹⁷³ "Cónsul mexicano: la migración continuará," *El Sol de Texas* (Dallas, TX), May 30, 1996, 3. Quote translated: “they will not discourage immigration, what they will do is make it more dangerous”

to Mexico. The Consejo Nacional de Población in Mexico reported that migrants opted to stay in the U.S. rather than gamble facing the risks of re-entry to the country¹⁷⁴. Even a retired INS district director, Mark Reed, who helped supervise Operation Gatekeeper's installation at the boundary admitted as much in a recent interview. "What we did is we took away safe passage and it became more difficult to get across. Instead of taking a bus to the border, it costs a lot of money and you paid a smuggler... Instead of a single man making his way up, now you brought the whole family up and you stayed"¹⁷⁵. Federal efforts to impose sovereign control of the boundary essentially backfired. Instead of occupying temporary space in the U.S., the new strategies made the boundary so unpleasant as to inspire larger numbers of people to remain in the country rather than chance the crossing a second time. These policies also failed to address the socio-political outcry that inspired them in the first place as author George Sánchez notes, "the Reagan/Bush era did not see a reversal of government spending despite all the rhetoric, but instead witnessed its redirection towards wealthy and corporate interests and away from long-term investment in education, infrastructure and safety nets for the poor". For Sánchez, this failed socio-economic strategy "left in its wake a sizable, disgruntled white electorate, one disaffected with politics that clamors for 'change' at every turn"¹⁷⁶. Yet when federal changes fail to produce the desired effect, the need for a scapegoat arises, and blaming the foreign immigrant has been a historically reliable tactic.

¹⁷⁴ "Medidas de control migratorio de la Patrulla Fronteriza han tenido impacto contrario: CONAPO," *El Informador* (Guadalajara, México), October 26, 1998, 3-A. Title translated: "The Border Patrol's control measures have had the opposite effect"

¹⁷⁵ Cindy Carcamo, "Border wall built in 1990s cut illegal immigration, but it also brought problems for a small town," *The Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, CA), March 9, 2018.

¹⁷⁶ George J. Sánchez, "Face the nation: Race, immigration, and the rise of nativism in late twentieth century America," *The International Migration Review* 31, no. 4 (Winter 1997): 1023.

In light of the failure to prevent or deter movement across the boundary, these Operations did not decrease the number of crossers in the long term, but instead succeeded in making crossing more perilous, and more expensive. As unauthorized crossings were necessarily displaced to increasingly less hospitable areas of the boundary, hired guides could now charge higher prices to help crossers navigate these unknown regions. Before the advent of the Operations in 1994, García et. al report that crossers did not frequently resort to hired guides to make the journey¹⁷⁷. These guides, known as polleros, pateros, or coyotes are hired to transport people across the boundary. Interestingly, the terms have a geographic relationship to the areas in which they conduct business. A “pollero” (a man who looks after chickens, generally with the ultimate goal of eating or selling them) operates in the desert regions of the boundary, whereas a “patero” (a duck hunter) works to shift persons across the Río Bravo del Norte. The nickname “coyote,” the term most North Americans are familiar with, is derived from a náhuatl word. Colloquially the term often refers to a person who is seeking to accomplish something outside of the institutionally approved methods, and can be associated with being a trickster¹⁷⁸. This language of course leaves the nicknames for the migrants themselves as helpless little chickens, ducks, or otherwise vulnerable creatures in the paws of a coyote. Apart from the exorbitant price tag, which researchers in 2006 estimated fluctuated between two to six thousand dollars, and the dangers of the natural environment, crossers must also fear their own guides. While cases of successful crosser-

¹⁷⁷ Nancy Janett García Vásquez et. al., "Movimientos transfronterizos México-Estados Unidos: Los polleros como agentes de movilidad," *CONfines* 3, no. 5 (January 2007): 104.

¹⁷⁸ David Spencer, Dr., *Mitos y realidades de un arquetipo fronterizo: Narrativos sobre el coyote mexicano*, Preparado para el XXXIII Congreso de la Asociación Latinoamericana de Sociología (Antigua, Guatemala, 2001), 8-9.

guide transactions exist, García et. al found that, “en gran cantidad de ocasiones, los polleros abandonan sus clientes cuando ven cerca el peligro de ser apresados por las autoridades. Además, dada la vulnerabilidad de muchos migrantes, los polleros se aprovechan de la situación y abusan de ellos”¹⁷⁹. Rather than the supposed lessening of violence or human rights violations at the frontier proposed by Congressman Mazzoli, instead the number of deaths increased due to the new spatial arrangements and their consequences¹⁸⁰. Essentially by addressing the symptoms of immigration via criminalization and interdiction, these policies of transforming boundary spaces to benefit the Border Patrol did not impact the desire or commitment of migrants to strive for the opportunities they believe wait for them on the other side. Migrants and their guides accordingly find fresh ways to evade the Border Patrol, and innovate new tactics to make the trip in response to each new law enforcement method. Boundary space is a site of spatial reinvention as participants on both sides—U.S. employee and unauthorized migrant alike—react to the environmental conditions created by topography, infrastructure, and other persons. As one former pollero remarked when asked about the illegal nature of his old job, “mientras que haya quien quiera cruzar, habrá gente como yo”¹⁸¹.

Conclusion

Enrique Loaeza, Coordinador General de Protección y Asuntos Consulares, a position created by the Mexican government to provide support, assistance, and advice to

¹⁷⁹ García Vásquez, et. al., "Movimientos transfronterizos," 104. Quote translated: “On most occasions, the polleros abandon their clients the moment they find themselves in danger of capture by the authorities. Furthermore, given the vulnerability of most migrants, the polleros take advantage of the situation and abuse them”

¹⁸⁰ García Vásquez, et. al., "Movimientos transfronterizos," 105.

¹⁸¹ García Vásquez, et. al., "Movimientos transfronterizos," 105. Quote translated” “As long as there are people who want to cross, there will be people like me.”

their nationals' abroad, was interviewed regarding the U.S. new boundary policies in 1996. When asked if he thought that xenophobia in the U.S. would fade, he responded, "No creo que vaya a cambiar esencialmente...las medidas que se están tomando no están pensadas sólo para el momento que se están dando, sino también a futuro"¹⁸². With the benefit of hindsight, it is clear that Loaeza was correct in assuming that Anglo-American socio-political anxiety about the U.S.-Mexico boundary would not fade. The conservative disquiet felt with respect to the Mexican migrant and the imaginary divide that separates one country from another boasts a lengthy history rooted in U.S. conquest, law, and the racial discrimination that inspired it. The story is one in which physical efforts to control a territorial divide became not only normalized, but expected and endorsed by a broad section of the public.

White concerns over immigration materialized alongside the inception of the U.S., as the creation of a sovereign territory necessarily involved defining the self (Anglo-American nation-state) in opposition to an other (everyone else). This widely accepted understanding of difference between both the surrounding territories and the persons that populated them makes the idea of the other—dangerous and alien to the self—possible. The supposed existence of a sharp distinction between types of people, in which one group is regarded as morally acceptable and others are seen as inherently hazardous, prompts an imagined need for security. This social construction of an outside threat from foreigners with allegedly unorthodox values, allows the state to justify and develop a dichotomy of human difference into discriminatory law and Operations at the

¹⁸² Robles, "Imposible pacto migratorio dada la xenofobia," 1A. Quote translated: "I don't think that it will change, fundamentally...the steps that they are taking are not conceived of just for the current situation, but also for the future."

boundary like the ones explored above. Consequently, the history of defining the U.S. as a nation, distinct from others, is necessarily caught up in the making of the “illegal” person and alleged illegality in boundary spaces.

Legislative efforts to regulate migrants through ports of entry and the advent of the U.S. Border Patrol encouraged those who were not white, could not pass the necessary exams, or afford the admission fees, to seek alternate avenues of entry. These policies created the now familiar contrast of legal/illegal migrants by creating legal and illegal spaces in which to cross U.S. boundaries. By increasing the list of offenses considered “illegal,” and by establishing practices that pushed “legal” entry beyond an accessible or sustainable reach of many, such policies multiplied the number of supposed crimes of migration. In its efforts to limit perceived illegality at the frontier, the state established a larger physical presence at the boundary, beginning with localized efforts like the Texas Rangers in the 1830s, growing to a federal effort with the establishment of the U.S. Border Patrol in 1924, and later swelling to large collection of agencies at work in the frontier today. Boundary control’s administration offers a clear example of the evolution of the narrative surrounding the foreign migrant. Though the Border Patrol began as part of the Department of Labor, it later shifted to the Department of Justice, and later became part of the Department of Homeland Security in the wake of 9/11. The mainstream and federal dialogue has essentially mirrored this trajectory, as concerns escalated from mere questions of job competition, to crime, and lately to fears of terrorism¹⁸³. The increased criminalization of boundary crossing feeds the associated ideology of the migrant as a person without respect for the law. The physical

¹⁸³ Jones, *Border Walls: Security and the War on Terror in the United States, India, and Israel*.

reinforcement of the boundary, while simultaneously a product and reflection of the cultural ideology that inspired it, equally acts as a spatial producer of those ideologies for some. The presence of law enforcement, and its infrastructures, is a necessary condition for the existence of boundary-crossing associated illegality, and the construction of the U.S. nation as superior to others.

Ultimately, U.S.' emergence as a nation-state is unavoidably related to various forms of "othering," and the criminalization of persons. The first Anglo-colonists cast the Native American populations as lesser individuals, villains that needed to be exterminated by the colonists militia units. This strategy of official units to police space, and consequently police the society that occupies it, gives way to all the forms of law enforcement later developed within the U.S. While Native Americans served as the original adversarial "other" to the lately arrived white colonists, and continue to suffer the consequences of this social definition, other ethnicities would not be left out of derogatory narratives as the U.S. constructed its national identity with respect to an exclusively Anglo-heritage. Further research on the subject of sovereign power and its concomitant spatial relationships might explore the connections to be made between immigrant communities' experiences and the policing of African Americans in the U.S, as both have been victims of criminalization.

The strategies of Operation Hold-the-line and Gatekeeper, which were implemented in the 1990s along the U.S.-Mexico boundary, necessarily reshaped the space and its contingent relationships of power. The spatial arrangements found at the boundary compose symbolic architectures that add tangible fortification to an abstract geography. These spaces privilege one group over another, as they manipulate the

available natural space to create a dynamic in which the crosser is more vulnerable. These infrastructures reflected the socio-political rhetoric that regarded the boundary as the logical site to make a final stand for the defense of U.S. domestic territory against outsiders. This portrayal of the boundary as a space of danger, and the physical reinforcement of this message via federal infrastructures at work in the frontier, mirrors and produces the idea of an “illegal” versus “legal” person. As Enrique Loaeza astutely predicted back in 1996, the intense increase in federal resources for boundary control in the mid 1990s and afterward, reflected a national drift toward mainstream support for continued efforts to police human mobility and criminalize unauthorized migrants. The long held incompatible dual goals proposed for boundary space by the U.S. government, in which the country is simultaneously open to economic opportunity, yet closed to allegedly undesirable persons remains, in spite of recent Presidential promises to control boundary space¹⁸⁴.

Further research on the subject of the interface between federal power and migrant related illegality might consider the relationship between unauthorized migrants and both literal and metaphysical spaces. Criminalization is an inherently spatial practice, as it often removes people from physical spaces by confining them to prison, or deporting them from the country. Furthermore, it often removes them from political and juridical spaces, as unauthorized migrants may incur criminal records that allow them fewer civil rights than others. They may be excluded from political and typical juridical practices altogether merely by being a foreign national, or by refusing to seek social services for fear of deportation or criminal charges. Migrants may also be omitted from less tangible

¹⁸⁴ Fabian, "Trump: Migrant caravan 'is an invasion.'"

areas, as seen with mainstream histories of the U.S. which often fail to include them beyond a mention. Yet the history of the U.S. is not just one of spatially associated criminalization of supposedly foreign persons, but also one of a nation-state predicated on civil rights and immigration to a new land. As Mexican-American journalist Christopher Cameron noted in 1995, “Es una hipocresía que una nación de inmigrantes se ocupe de atacar a los inmigrantes”¹⁸⁵.

¹⁸⁵ Cameron, "Reformas migratorias, insulto a los ciudadanos de origen mexicano." Quote translated: “It is hypocrisy that a nation of immigrants busies itself with attacking immigrants”.

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