

Busting the Bandito Boyz: Militarism, Masculinity, and the Hunting of Undocumented Persons in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands

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“Bandito heroes flourish in many cultures because they symbolize a virtually universal belief: that at times it’s necessary to break the law in order to obtain justice,” writes historian Paul Vanderwood (1992, p. xix). The idea of justice does seem to animate many of the stories associated with the borderlands’ most famous outlaws. For example, retaliatory justice appears to be at the heart of the literal violence that Joaquin Murrieta inflicted on California Anglos during the nineteenth century. Joaquin Murrieta became famous for his lightning-fast robberies and bloody assaults in California during the 1850s Gold Rush. Reportedly, Murrieta was set on his fiery path as the result of racially-tinged violence aimed at him years earlier by white residents (Irwin, 2007).

Justice also figures prominently in the reverence which the poor hold for the altars built to memorialize the righteous bandito Jesus Malverde of Sinoloa, Mexico. Jesus Malverde was a Robin Hood figure in Northern Mexico during the late nineteenth century. It is rumored that he “stole gold coins from the rich hacienda owners . . . and threw them in the doorways of the poor at night” (Price, 2005, pp. 175, 197). Murrieta and Malverde share the distinction of being embraced by alienated and disaffected masses.

Scholars have noted, however, that despite the prototypical role that banditos have played in western history and folklore, the bandito concept is actually quite porous—it can be used to symbolize and justify almost any kind of movement or cause (Price, 2005). In our post-9/11 world, bandito imagery has been appropriated by those whose sense of justice turns on their ability to confront and objectify immigrant populations.

Recently, groups like the Minuteman organization have gained significant notoriety nationally. Principally civilian, these “militias” have transformed what was formerly only nativist rhetoric into action through the interdiction of undocumented persons attempting to cross the border into the United States. Like modern-day banditos, Minuteman “volunteers” revel in using lawless tactics to further their anti-immigrant agendas. Armed with technology and firearms, they systematically track undocumented persons across borderland regions.

Despite the controversial nature of their activities, these militias have

been able to marshal support from a worried American public (BDT/CNC, 2006). In many ways, these groups have been successful because they have been able to skillfully distance their opposition to illegal immigration from crude racialized ideas regarding the immigrant crossers themselves (p. 4). These groups have substituted more benign language that emphasizes the “incompatibility” of third-world alienage with American traditions, heritage, and culture (Gilroy cited in Chavez, 2001, p. 128; Ross & Maury, 1997, p. 552).

Minuteman leaders, in particular, have artfully melded public concerns involving terrorism and borderland crime into their anti-immigrant discourse. But regardless of its form, such heated opposition still stigmatizes undocumented persons in ways that are consistent with racially driven animus (Johnson, 1997). Dark-skinned immigrants seem to fuel the scorching racial ideologies and stereotypes that serve to “demarcate the boundaries of national culture and belonging to place, and to exclude those that do not fit” (Elder, Wolch, & Emel, 1998, p. 73). Moreover, branding immigrants as intruders, aliens, criminal trespassers, or potential terrorists seamlessly strips them of “rights and personhood . . . making violence against them not only legitimate but required” (Coutin, 2003, p. 46). It may well be the case that these anti-immigrant groups are employing less offensive language as moral subterfuge to obfuscate deleterious behavior clearly aimed at undocumented persons.

In this particular context, Minuteman recruits are also ritualizing their own masculinity while tracking and capturing undocumented persons. This article explores how protean masculinities become inextricably linked to ideas like racial domination in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands (Stern, 2004). In section I, I demonstrate how protean masculinities become linked to racial domination through Minuteman ideologies. In section II, I discuss how protean masculinities become linked to racial domination by Minuteman activities. In section III, I describe how protean masculinities become linked to racial domination through the fraternal bonding which Minuteman ideologies and activities encourage. Alchemized, these components are expansive and porous enough to include non-white and non-male individuals in Minuteman culture; but these members are incorporated in ways that require them to buttress the asymmetrical alignment of white masculinity relative to the alien culture of illegal entrants.

I. PROTEAN MASCULINITIES AND RACIALIZED IDEOLOGIES IN THE U.S.-MEXICO BORDERLANDS

Like other fraternal organizations, the Minuteman alliance has become a virtual “testing ground” for differing conceptions of manhood (Stern,

2007/08]

BUSTING THE BANDITO BOYZ

9

2004, p. 300). Manhood is informed by protean masculinities, which are gendered sensibilities whose content is continually shaped through male rituals and activities (Bederman, 1996). In the context of this paper, the concept of protean masculinities is used to track and describe the fusion of masculinity, militarism, and racism within a vigilante group operating along the U.S.-Mexico border. Militarism, writes Cynthia Enloe (2000), has a way of privileging masculinity by continually encoding it within the corpus of military regimes not only through the infusion of longstanding cultural beliefs, but also through deliberate decisions that prioritize masculine values. Clearly, in the case of Minuteman organizations, there also is a strong racial component to the development of their masculine ideals. For them, masculinity becomes synonymous with “white manhood,” and white manhood is reified through racism and domination (pp. 23, 26; ADL, www.adl.org/main_Extremism/immigration_extremists.htm; BAN, 2002). Evaluating racially motivated groups like the Minuteman provides a unique opportunity to analyze how racism and masculinity help structure ideas involving crime, nation, and community as these subjects pertain to embattled issues such as undocumented immigration. Groups like the Minuteman provide an extraordinarily rich environment for the study of ways in which malicious ideologies (e.g. racial domination) can take root and flourish within the evolution of conceptions of manhood. Moreover, the U.S.-Mexico borderlands provides an intriguing setting for an analysis of how these racialized identities reach fruition through militarism (Bederman, 1996; Genova, 2004). The U.S.-Mexico borderlands represent fertile ground for Minuteman groups to expound malicious ideologies like racial domination, for several reasons.

First, the borderlands are the *sine qua non* for malicious ideologies because they are a wellspring of racialized symbolism. For example, the border itself is emblematic of the stark differences that distinguish the U.S. from Mexico; serving as both a material and figurative boundary, it demarcates the first world from the third, affluence from poverty, and white from non-white races. In this particular instance, the international boundary also separates legal citizens from non-citizens. Perhaps, like mythic frontier heroes, the members of the Minuteman group see themselves as standing “between the opposing worlds of savagery and civilization” (Slotkin, 1998, p. 17). To them, it is the colored bodies of immigrants that makes immigrants more primitive and brings them in closer proximity to the “unbridled biological urges and passions of animals” (Elder et al., p. 83). As white men, they believe their racial pedigree obligates them to protect the nation from mixed-blood hordes attempting to invade their domain, with the southern border representing the key threshold they must defend.

Second, the borderlands are ideal places to forge malicious ideologies

because their tortured histories collectively lend themselves to such ritualized activities. Historically, the borderlands had their genesis in a confrontational war which emphasized American colonial power in the southwest (Perea, 2003). The 1846 Mexican-American War punched a geopolitical hole through a hostile region that had been subject to several years of chronic violence between competing ethnic groups. U.S. colonial officials, in an attempt to suppress borderland conflict, superimposed American legal and military institutions onto populations resentful of each other and also of the U.S. occupation. But rather than promoting equanimity, these colonial activities further degraded already destabilized situations, or, taken together, achieved only incremental successes over time. The difficulties associated with controlling the borderlands would continually resurface as an important theme and the nation would become increasingly concerned about protecting its own borders from rogue elements.

One historical example is particularly instructive on two key points of the aforementioned border protection theme: First, this period will demonstrate that race and race relations would play an increasingly significant role in gritty border politics; second, and perhaps most sobering, it also reveals that material efforts to physically police the expansive borderlands would remain as futile contemporaneously as they proved historically.

In 1848, at the end of the Mexican-American War, a peace treaty was signed; that document was named the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. In Article XI of that treaty, the U.S. legally obligated itself to subdue transnational raiding by American Indians into northern Mexico. For several decades, Indian raiders had devastated northern settlements by pillaging livestock and taking native Mexicans captive. For example, in 1835, Rancho de las Animus, which was located in Parral, Mexico, was put to the torch and burned by Comanches who also took thirty-nine captives (Brooks, 2002, p. 265). Five years later, on October 6, 1840, officials in San Francisco de Canas reported that roving Indian bands had murdered four persons and taken a Mexican family of five captive in Puerto de Arco (Canales, 1968, p. 108). Such hard-scrabble booty would subsequently be transported back across the international boundary and sold in American markets. At war's end, there may have been as many as 160,000 Indians living in the southwest (Report of Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1853). U.S. Army Colonel William Gilpin estimated that Comanche bands held approximately 600 Mexican origin captives and Apaches had about 800 Mexican prisoners (U.S. House Exec. Doc., 1848-1849). Yet, given the fluid and embryonic nature of intelligence operations at the time, these initial estimates might have reflected a dramatic undercount of the actual captive population. In fact, field reports from Mexico indicate the potential for far more captives due to the extensive number of Indian raids into northern Mexico. Two

2007/08]

BUSTING THE BANDITO BOYZ

11

examples illustrate the expansive nature of captive-taking raids. First, in 1840-1841, hundreds of Comanche raiders had taken more than one hundred Mexican captives from haciendas and pueblos near Saltillo, Mexico (Brooks, 2002). Second, by 1848, Apache bands had effectively “depopulated” or obstructed approximately 150 dwellings and settlements in Sonora, Mexico alone (Rippy, 1919).

Prevailing post-war racial sentiments led American leaders to erroneously believe that the dominant Anglo-Saxon culture could quickly vanquish Indian raiding parties then targeting northern Mexico. But American attempts to successfully interdict these raids ended five years later when the U.S. unceremoniously negotiated its way out of that obligation vis-à-vis additional treaty negotiations and monetary compensation (DeLay, 2007, p. 67). A lack of manpower and resources, coupled with highly elusive Indian raiders and a two-thousand-mile area along the border, repeatedly frustrated all attempts by the U.S. to abolish Indian raids flowing from the U.S. southward. It is unclear whether, in 1853, U.S. officials internalized the stinging logistical challenges they would face in attempting to police the borderlands. But they likely took note that it was local ethnic populations that were resisting their colonial rule. After that time, policing the borderlands began to evolve as a racialized project. However, the aim shifted from policing internal threats radiating outward, to repelling external threats transgressing inward. The movement of mixed-blood persons across the border became a growing concern for the American public, who had long since embraced the myth that the U.S. was principally a white nation (Gomez, 2007; Horseman, 1981; Feagin, 2001). The concepts of annexation and border protection became integral to the maintenance and continuation of that myth: that the southwest was a barren area ripe for the expansion of American economic ingenuity (Rebert, 2001, pp. 196-197).

In the twentieth century, widespread concern over illegal immigration from Mexico became imbricated with emerging criminal justice protocols. Undocumented persons, formerly categorized as Mexican “wetbacks,” were seamlessly transformed into “criminal aliens” (Lytle, 2003). This distinction was important because it shifted immigration from being a labor-management issue, to being a law enforcement problem. Powerful new solutions could then be aggressively implemented to deal with looming threats caused by newly minted “criminal alien activity.” In practice, harsh immigration policies—like arrest, detention, and deportation—that targeted Mexicans as criminal aliens, crystallized the close relationship that illegality and race had in the public’s collective mind (Ngai, 2004). Hostile legislation aimed at relieving states from the alleged economic burdens generated by criminal aliens also created harsh portrayals of immigrant

threats to the livelihood and well-being of the U.S. (Nesbert & Sellgren, 1995).

In the 1990s, race, immigration, and crime became densely interwoven as weapons and drug-trafficking were talked about within the general framework of immigration reform. For instance, James Bowen, a senior tactical coordinator with Operation Alliance—a joint border task force of military and civilian authorities—stated, “Operation Alliance was established to interdict the flow of drugs, weapons, aliens, currency, and other *contraband* across the southwestern border” (Dunn, 1995, p. 113). Tactical interpretations like this conflated terrorism, drug-trafficking, and illegal immigration into a unified threat to national security. It also elevated illegal immigration from being principally a criminal justice issue, to being a problem with national security implications. As a result, policy-makers and military leaders attempted to find comprehensive solutions to bundled national security problems like border protection and illegal immigration. Officials would find their remedy in the militarization of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. Military and defense officials, concerned about the possible ramifications of a porous southern border, began to militarize border zones by infusing military technology, munitions, and strategies into civilian enforcement paradigms (p. 20). This not only further criminalized Mexican entrants, but also branded them as potential enemy combatants.

Thus, despite the fact that undocumented entrants are overwhelmingly from the ranks of civilian non-combatant populations, the militarization of the southern border has exposed them to increasing levels of violence as if they were enemy combatants. In this particular instance, borderland violence is also racially animated because there is a pattern or practice of violent activity or conditions that routinely subjects a racially cognizable class, like undocumented persons (e.g. mixed blood persons), to material harms (Kil & Menjivar, 2006; Rosas, 2006). Well-authenticated shootings, rapes, and beatings by U.S. border agents against immigrant crossers, as well as skyrocketing deaths triggered by unforgiving desert conditions, have made migrant deaths and injuries in the borderlands almost routine (Vargas, 2001). For instance, U.S. Border Patrol Agent Nicholas Corbett was recently ordered to stand trial on charges of second-degree murder, manslaughter, and negligent homicide in the January 12, 2007 shooting of Mexican national Francisco Rivera (McCombs, 2007). Moreover, the number of deceased undocumented persons brought to Arizona’s Pima County Medical Examiner’s Office has soared. The number of recovered bodies of unauthorized border crossers has risen from 125 (1990-1999) to 802 (2000-2005), with deaths principally due to exposure, automobile accidents, and undetermined causes (BMI, 2006, p. 41). To a war-weary American public, the periodic “known” deaths and injuries of migrant crossers might be of

2007/08]

BUSTING THE BANDITO BOYZ

13

little concern. In fact, it may well be that widespread anti-immigrant sentiment has made these incidents seem justified as the risk that alien intruders assume for transgressing illegally across American borders.

In this militarized context, private groups emerged from the shadowy world of hate to indulge themselves in the tortured world of borderland politics. Perhaps intoxicated by the racialized myth of the western frontier, these groups began to hunt and track undocumented persons. In 1997, Klan Border Watch (KBW), a group whose lineage extends directly from the infamous Ku Klux Klan, began patrolling the border for Mexican immigrants. Though short-lived, KBW sought to frame their activities in stark terms: They were fighting a “battle to halt the flow of illegal aliens streaming across the border from Mexico” (BDT/CNC, 2006, p. 3).

Other loosely-knit groups also began to materialize and develop their own anti-immigrant agendas. In California, self-appointed citizen groups trolled local airports in San Diego for “suspicious” looking individuals (Yoxall, 2006, p. 526). Organized campaigns gathered to “light up the border” by stationing a line of cars adjacent to the Mexican border at night and turning on their headlights to illuminate “alien intruders” (p. 526). Moreover, individuals who acted alone but were caught up in the general mayhem of borderland violence increasingly resorted to deadly force against undocumented persons without provocation. In May 2000, Samuel Blackwood was arrested after shooting and killing Eusebio de Haro when Haro and his traveling companion stopped at Blackwood’s ranch to ask for some water (Martinez, 2004).

Perhaps encouraged by the aforementioned developments, but aware of the need for more robust organization, southeast Arizona rancher Roger Barnett spearheaded a local drive to mobilize ranchers against the influx of undocumented persons traveling through the area. Local ranchers quickly established home arsenals and militarized their properties against alien trespassers. In the late 1990s, Ranch Rescue (RR) emerged as the capstone organization for the new vigilante movement in the southwest. RR’s mission was to protect the property rights of local ranchers via the armed interdiction and detention of individuals they suspected were in the nation illegally (Castro, 2002). Several publicized “citizens arrests” by RR members took place, including highly suspicious incidents involving the armed pirating of private vehicles on public highways and the use of hunting dogs to track and attack migrant detainees (pp. 207-208).

Perhaps emboldened by the prospect of hunting human beings for sport publicly, allied individuals began to organize parallel groups. Raw and earthy, these groups embraced a more expansive anti-immigrant agenda that included patrolling public spaces. Quickly, the solicitation of like-minded persons sparked splinter cells whose new organizational firebrand

was defense of family, nation, and culture. This ideological manifesto fit seamlessly with the borderland militarism that had been taking root since the 1980s.

In October 2004, the Minuteman Project was organized to track and apprehend persons its members suspected were unlawfully in the nation. Typically, this meant undocumented persons from places like Mexico. But the borderlands are a complicated place; cultural taxonomies like ancestry and national origin are not always easily discernible. Yet the apparent risk of detaining lawful residents, such as Mexican Americans, did not seem to pose any ethical issues for Minuteman officials (Kil, 2006; Stern, 2004). In the group's initial stages, the Minuteman members were racially homogeneous, comprised mostly of retired white men (BDT/CNC, 2006).

Minuteman leaders have taken great care to describe themselves and their intentions in non-menacing terms. One prong of the Minuteman movement, the Minuteman Civil Defense Corps (MCDC), describes its mission accordingly: "to see the borders and coastal boundaries of the United States secured against the unlawful and unauthorized entry of all individuals, contraband, and foreign military. We will employ all means of civil protest, demonstration, and political lobbying to accomplish this goal" (www.minutemanhq.com/hq/aboutus.php).

Ostensibly, this MCDC mission statement appears benign because there is an absence of overtly racist language and the stated objectives are relatively non-confrontational. On its face, the mission statement describes mainstream political activities that have become widely accepted practices which American citizens routinely utilize to promote peaceful social change. In this instance, the change sought is stronger border enforcement and the exclusion of alien cultures. In practice, the MCDC has embraced unconventional definitions of "civil protest" and "demonstration." To the Minuteman, these terms include the clandestine surveillance and armed apprehension of migrant crossers (Castro, 2002, pp. 203-205). MCDC tactical renditions also incorporate the use of high-tech weaponry and paramilitary strategies to aid in the capture of undocumented persons.

Publicly, MCDC leaders are media-savvy individuals who consciously avoid using racial epithets when referring to undocumented persons, as can be seen in, for example, the Minuteman Pledge and the preface thereto (<http://www.minutemanhq.com/hq/mmpledge.php>). Rather, they have chosen to promulgate the label "illegal alien." As noted earlier, the term "illegal alien" collectively transforms undocumented persons into a dehumanized and racially-coded entity. To the Minuteman, undocumented persons are a threatening menace bent on inflicting ruin on an unsuspecting American nation. Despite this alarming scenario, MCDC officials continue to insist that their activities are intended only to assist law enforcement and

2007/08]

BUSTING THE BANDITO BOYZ

15

strengthen national security at the border (www.minutemanhq.com). Invoking a law-and-order mantra, peppered with paranoid imagery, Minuteman websites proclaim, “Our nation was founded as a nation governed by the ‘rule of law’, not by the whims of mobs of ILLEGAL aliens who endlessly stream across U.S. borders” (Walker, 2007, p. 148). Minuteman leaders have skillfully sought to play on the fears of the American public. For example, MCDC founder Chris Simcox revels in stoking the flames of nativism—routinely raising the specter of the 9/11 attacks: “It is well known that terrorists are seeking to exploit the vulnerability of our open borders. They see the millions upon millions of aliens that have been able to sneak into this country—illegally under our federal laws, yet virtually unchecked” (Seper, 2006a, para. 8).¹

Blustery dictum notwithstanding, these aforementioned statements convey two important ideas that reveal a ritualized and racially charged agenda within the Minuteman movement. First, MCDC and other Minutemen outfits religiously underscore the criminal dimension of the act of crossing the border without proper documentation. Their almost exclusive focus on the U.S.-Mexico border is misleading because illegal entry can also take place along the Canadian border, and coastal port security remains uncertain (GAO Report, 2007; Haveman, Schatz, & Vilchis, 2005). Moreover, oftentimes undocumented persons materialize within the U.S. due to expired student and business visas (Pew Hispanic Center Report, 2006). In truth, there are gradations to law-breaking, and highlighting unauthorized entry at the U.S.-Mexico border as a criminal act unfairly imbues undocumented persons with a scorching diabolical hue. Second, the fact that the Minuteman members have taken it upon themselves to patrol the U.S.-Mexico borderlands is quite illuminating. Generally speaking, their behavior presupposes that they are the ones best suited to supplement the work of immigration authorities and defend the nation against alien intruders. This charts an adversarial course in which white is juxtaposed with non-white asymmetrically.

These Minuteman “axioms” meld racism and masculinity in ways both provocative and troubling. Militarism, having evolved in the violent context of the borderlands, has harshly criminalized undocumented entrants (e.g. criminal aliens). In the borderlands, undocumented entrants are principally of Mexican ancestry; hence, they are non-white mixed blood persons (e.g. Mestiza/o). Ergo, non-white mixed blood immigrants have become synonymous with criminal aliens, and criminal aliens have been interpreted to be a threat to the U.S. “Alien terminology helps ritualize the harsh treatment of persons from other countries,” writes Professor Kevin Johnson, and all too often, “alien” is used as a proxy to justify racism and racially motivated acts

by those who feel threatened by the presence of undocumented persons (Johnson, 1997, pp. 267-270).

Within the Minuteman context, I suspect that many of the white male members harbor exaggerated fears of immigrants because they believe that immigrants will disrupt age-old ascriptive hierarchies that have ruled American society from its earliest days. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center's 2007 Intelligence Report entitled "Getting Immigration Fallacies Straight," from the perspectives of those white males, immigrants bring crime, mongrel languages, disease, overpopulation, and probably a drain on societal resources. Conversely, white males believe they are the architects of advanced civilizations—bringing wealth, promoting liberty, and cultivating important intellectual endeavors. To permit Mestizo immigrants to amass within the U.S. would be to invite the destruction of American culture, and, ultimately, of white men.

But the only way in which white males—or, mythically speaking, American culture—can survive alongside criminal castes like Mestizo immigrants, is to enforce boundaries. Thus, at all costs, white males, acting through official or unofficial organizations like the Minuteman, must police the geographic and legal boundaries of the nation. This scrutiny is achieved in part by hunting and capturing immigrants at the border using military equipment and tactical strategies. Operational paradigms like this effectively ritualize the racial domination of white males over mixed-blood persons within the borderlands. The thrill of pursuit and capture reinvigorates male notions of power, protection, and control. In the end, Minuteman ideologies provide white males with the opportunity to reaffirm white masculinities by exposing Mestizo immigrants to unacceptable levels of literal and figurative violence because Mestizo immigrants are a "criminal alien caste."

The connection between racism and Minuteman culture might not be obvious to laypersons engaging Minuteman rhetoric for the first time. In fact, they expressly disavow such associations and trumpet the assertion that Minuteman outfits are multi-ethnic groups with several members married to immigrants (Walker, 2007). But the malicious ideologies harbored by the Minuteman members lie just beneath the surface of the public image they project. Bill Straus, Regional Director for the Arizona-ADL, summarizes the connection between racism and the Minuteman in the article "ADL Says Armed Anti-Immigration Groups in Arizona Share Ties to White Supremacists":

Anti-immigration groups are engaged in a campaign of vigilantism and intimidation, and their ideology has all the hallmarks of the hateful rhetoric promoted by anti-semites and racists. We are greatly concerned that

2007/08]

BUSTING THE BANDITO BOYZ

17

the collusion of anti-immigration groups and their extremist sympathizers is contributing to the growing climate of intolerance, lawlessness and violence along the Arizona-Mexico border. (ADL Report, 2005)

If statements and actions by Minuteman members are any indication, the collusion between Minuteman volunteers and known racist elements seems to be quite significant. Malicious ideologies, integral to the reification of white manhood, are typically expounded in Minuteman operational settings. Planning, patrol, and recruitment activities all reflect sentiments that intimately meld racism with masculinity. For instance, on April 2, 2005, members of the neo-nazi National Alliance (Phoenix, Arizona Chapter) joined the ranks of a Minuteman group protesting at a local border patrol station (SPLC Intelligence Report, 2005b). The fact that neo-nazis attended and participated in this Minuteman event suggests that these neo-nazis identified closely with the rally's anti-immigrant agenda. Just days before, the National Alliance had handed out flyers in Tombstone, Arizona. These flyers read, "Non-Whites are turning America into a Third World slum . . . they come for welfare and take our jobs" (quoted in "Nazis, racists join Minuteman Project," SPLC Intelligence Report, 2005a). Further, on April 3, 2005, an armed Minuteman volunteer who went by the name of Carl was overheard at a Minuteman watch station stating the following: "It should be legal to kill illegals . . . just shoot 'em on sight. That's my immigration policy recommendation. You break into my country, you die" (SPLC Intelligence Report, 2005b, para. 4). Minuteman Joe McCutchen, on the other hand, might not expressly advocate the killing of undocumented persons, but he arms himself with a .38 caliber revolver and flak jacket on his Bisbee, Arizona patrols (SPLC Intelligence Report, 2005a). McCutchen, a longtime affiliate of the white supremacist group the Council of Conservative Citizens, believes that the undocumented are an invasive people: "We're losing our language to them, losing our culture. They're taking over, and if we don't stop [immigration], our society will not survive. That's why I am here" (para. 13). These incidental statements illustrate the racially animated motivations that drive the involvement of many Minuteman volunteers. The fact that members of this group arm themselves and gather to hunt undocumented persons reflects a "pack mentality" that fuels a convergent litany of malicious aggressions against those persons whom they suspect of being undocumented.

Recruitment activities inspired by the Minuteman groups also have the unmistakable etchings of masculinity and racism. For example, white supremacist Kalen Riddle leads the recruitment drive in Arizona for the border watch group the Arizona Guard (AG). According to the American Defense League, Riddle uses the AG website to encourage recruits to arm

themselves for border missions “to help local ranchers and citizens defend property rights from illegal alien activity” (ADL Report, 2004a). Quixotic plans to defend the border via armed patrols appeal to the allegorical role that white males have historically played as protectors and champions of Anglo nation and family.

Laine Lawless, former collaborator with Minuteman founder Chris Simcox, now runs an anti-immigrant group known as the Border Guardians. Lawless has made a name for herself within extremist and anti-immigrant circles by doing outrageous stunts like burning the Mexican flag in front of the Mexican consulate in Phoenix, Arizona (Lemons, 2007). An Intelligence Report from the Southern Poverty Law Center recently reported on an email written by Lawless that had been sent to Mark Martin, commander of the nation’s largest group of white supremacist Nazis (Norrell, 2006). Lawless suggested in that email that Martin’s Nazi organization “harass and terrorize” undocumented persons (Norrell, 2006; Lemons, 2007). Specifically, Lawless suggested robbing undocumented persons leaving banks, discouraging Spanish-speaking children from attending schools, and even sabotaging the food and drink of immigrant persons. The Lawless email represents an ironic and interesting twist on the nexus between white masculinity and racism because Laine Lawless is a woman.

Her involvement demonstrates that white women will sometimes aid and abet a gendered project aimed at constructing and reifying white manhood. Her support of this project, through her solicitation of violence against undocumented persons, underscores her complicity along two lines. First, her nefarious plot furthers not only the subordination of Mestizo immigrants, but her own subordination as well. Her malevolent solicitation entrenches the asymmetrical alignment of white males relative to mixed blood immigrants. It conveys the idea that white males are uniquely situated to punish the unlawful transgressions of alien intruders. Yet in many ways, she is also conceding her own position to white males, by encouraging them to carry out the material violence that she cannot or will not undertake herself. This strengthens the position of white males within the supremacist movement. It is supremacist men, rather than supremacist women, that get to claim the symbolic trophy of assaulting undocumented persons. Group ideologies that encourage and justify racially motivated aggressions against undocumented persons reify and ritualize the dominant status of white males relative to non-white others. It is through the violent context of this ideological evolution that protean masculinities become inextricably linked to racial domination in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands.

2007/08]

BUSTING THE BANDITO BOYZ

19

II. PROTEAN MASCULINITIES AND RACIALIZED ACTIVITIES IN THE
U.S.-MEXICO BORDERLANDS

Peter Kraska writes, “The interwoven scripts of militarism and masculinity provide the cultural foundations for organized forms of violence by militaries and police, and their taken-for-granted scripts furnish a more diffuse, but still pervasive social network of threatened and real violence among individual men” (Kraska, 2001, p. 154). The Minuteman group provides perhaps the most interesting portrayal of scripted organizational violence in the borderlands. Minuteman violence takes place in both a figurative and literal sense: it is signified in the clothes the group members wear, the firearms they carry, and the language they use. Moreover, it becomes manifest in the activities they undertake on the front lines of the U.S.-Mexico border. Outwardly, they invoke a law-and-order mantra, but privately, they act like frontier banditos—skirting law whenever and wherever possible.

In fact, despite Minuteman protestations that they are not a paramilitary group, the *MCDC Volunteer Training Manual* is a virtual lexicon of war-related symbols, icons, and metaphors, all organized toward tracking and capturing undocumented persons. The manual’s index partitions the guide into several subsections, including communications, line watch, field survival, sector orientation, and the MCDC chain of command (*MCDC Volunteer Training Manual*, n.d.). Each component reflects an adversarial theme that encourages volunteers to view undocumented persons as the “enemy” and themselves as cultural warriors.

For instance, in the communications section, the *MCDC Volunteer Training Manual* advises volunteers to utilize an ear-bud and lapel microphone for their field radios so as not to compromise their positions during night-time operations (*MCDC Volunteer Training Manual*, p. 7). Ostensibly, compromising their position would rob volunteers of the ability to surprise (e.g. ambush) migrants moving across their watch line. The guide also recommends that volunteers utilize a personal call sign during mission communications to avoid divulging their true identities publicly (p. 7). Finally, this section contains a phonetic alphabet so volunteers can encrypt their communications with each other in covert fashion.

Further, the training guide provides advice on tactical surveillance methods in its section on line watch (*MCDC Volunteer Training Manual*, p. 10). The manual underscores the importance of light and noise discipline when volunteers man a surveillance post: “Too much noise or light can cause illegal aliens to choose a different route where they may have better luck getting through, which is obviously counter-productive to our objective” (p. 10). In a nod to its clandestine heritage, the guide teaches volun-

teers how to maintain their cover at night by employing small lights with red or blue lenses that do not give away their location or impair their night vision (p. 10). It also alerts volunteers to listen for differences in desert noises—the sound of a twig snapping or gravel crunching underfoot is an indication that a person is moving through their sector. Finally, this section advises volunteers to use their radios sparingly and only in short bursts, so as not to reveal themselves or other hidden volunteers. The ambush protocols in the MCDC manual raise troubling issues. It may be the case that anti-government militias, racist organizations that are deeply imbedded in paramilitary cultures have been training border vigilante groups like the Minuteman (ADL Report, 2004b; Dees, 1996; Snow, 1999; Neiwert, 1999; Dyer, 1998). If true, MCDC and other Minuteman outfits bring with them a new potential to unleash lethal operations against undocumented persons.

In any event, the MCDC manual orients volunteers to border watch duties as if they were in an actual combat setting. For instance, it splices the desert geography utilizing military nomenclature. The guide explains that a sector is a 2 or 3 mile long area known for high illegal alien traffic. Further, it notes that each section contains 10-15 watch stations placed a few hundred yards apart (*MCDC Volunteer Training Manual*, p. 14). Each volunteer will be assigned to man a watch station by a sector supervisor. Once at the assigned station, volunteers are advised to study the surrounding area to identify possible routes through which illegal aliens might try to escape (p. 14). Routine briefings, tactical strategies, and a military regimen further augment Minuteman activities.

The MCDC manual also provides a detailed listing of what well-equipped Minuteman volunteers should bring to the front lines, including boots, gloves, binoculars, FRS radios, cell phones, video cameras, and flashlights (*MCDC Volunteer Training Manual*, p. 21). Perhaps in an attempt to recreate the cold, mechanistic look of a techno-warrior, volunteers are also encouraged to bring spotting scopes, night vision equipment, re-hydration fluids, thermo cameras, infrared detection devices, motion sensors, and a trail counter (Kraska, 2001, pp. 144-145).

Moreover, the training guide provides a military flow chart that outlines the MCDC chain of command. The MCDC leadership hierarchy consists of a chapter head, operations officer, media coordinator, communications center, sector chiefs, shift leaders, and volunteers. As in the military, power flows downward and channels outward to different tactical branches. Interestingly, the manual contains the following policy regarding volunteer dress: “We will not accept anyone dressing *infull* [*sic*] military or special-ops garb; it sends an image to the public that we don’t want sent” (*MCDC Volunteer Training Manual*, p. 16). Officially, the MCDC also allows volunteers to carry only sidearms as opposed to long

2007/08]

BUSTING THE BANDITO BOYZ

21

rifles (p. 14). Yet despite these prohibitions, field operations sometimes depart radically from these rules, particularly within the smoldering environment of racism, masculinity, and militarism that frequently punctuates Minutemen settings.

In fact, activities like patrolling, tracking, and apprehension that Minuteman volunteers typically undertake appeal strongly to the predatory instincts that often earmark the clandestine operations of organized hate groups. Like modern-day banditos, the Minuteman members routinely take risks and frequently transgress both criminal law and their own written protocols in order to capture and punish persons they believe are undocumented. For instance, MCDC official Chris Simcox was convicted in 2004 for illegally carrying a sidearm in a federal forest while tracking undocumented crossers (Buchanon & Holthouse, 2005). He is now prohibited from carrying a firearm personally, but he travels with others who are armed. Further, Casey Nethercott, who worked closely with Arizona-based vigilante groups, was arrested on a Texas warrant in March 2004 (ADL, 2004a). He has also been criminally charged for pistol-whipping an undocumented person (para. 5). Generally speaking, Minuteman operations lack a substantial supervisory component because reckless behavior by volunteers in the field abounds. For example, despite the fact that MCDC rules expressly forbid the use of assault weapons, Minuteman volunteers still sometimes conceal them in their personal belongings. In fact, on one 2006 mission, two volunteers brought assault weapons and extra clips with them in the event that “anything” went down during their watch (SPLC Intelligence Report, 2005b). Thus, with a wink and a nod, Minuteman rules are blatantly disregarded. Complicating matters is that the Minuteman command and control structure does not appear to diligently inventory or account for the kinds of firearms that their volunteers carry with them. This lawless behavior demonstrates a cavalier disregard for basic gun safety and for the personal safety of volunteers and immigrants alike. Ironically, some Minuteman outfits make volunteers sign a “Waiver of Liability and Assumption of the Risk” agreement to protect themselves and the Minuteman organization against lawsuits relating to their patrols (www.minutemanproject.com/WAIVER-OF-LIABILITY).² In the end, military symbolism and actions are collectively structured by racism and masculinity. In this way, protean masculinities become inextricably linked to racial domination through Minutemen activities.

III. PROTEAN MASCULINITIES AND RACIALIZED BONDING IN THE U.S.-MEXICO BORDERLANDS

Fraternal bonding alchemizes the malicious ideologies and activities of

the Minuteman members through masculine rituals that seduce volunteers into believing they are part of a majestic overarching project aimed at protecting American families, the nation, and American culture (www.minutemanhq.com/hq/borderops_pledge.php).³ *Esprit de corps* idolatry pervades almost every aspect of volunteerism as candidates are inducted into Minutemen culture. From recruitment, to rallies, and ultimately, to line watch, volunteers are continually peppered with propaganda and male bravado that glorify the collective ambition of the Minuteman to conquer the Mestizo aliens in a “savage war.”

In his book *Gunfighter Nation*, Richard Slotkin artfully describes the symbolism behind the savage war trope: “The premise of the ‘savage war’ is that ineluctable political and social differences—rooted in some combination of ‘blood’ and culture make coexistence between primitive natives and civilized Europeans impossible on any basis other than that of subjugation” (Slotkin, 1998, p. 12). In this instance, co-existence is operationalized by the racial exclusion of Mestizo immigrants at the border by armed Minuteman patrols (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1992). This asymmetrical co-existence is also enforced by denying those immigrants already in the U.S. full recognition in American society because of their undocumented status.

“Yes! I want to stop the occupying army and secure America,” states the Minuteman Project’s recruitment webpage (www.minutemanproject.com/organization/join/asp). To this group, America’s health care and educational systems are at stake in the immigration wars. According to the same Minuteman webpage, these institutions are under continual assault by insatiable “Illegal Alien Armies” that refuse to assimilate into American culture. Recent scholarship, however, casts doubt on many of these claims. For example, the Pew Hispanic Center has just released a study on English usage among U.S. Hispanics. In that report, Pew documented that 88% of the U.S.-born children of first generation immigrants speak English fluently (Hakimzadeh & Cohn, 2007). According to Hakimzadeh and Cohn (2007), that percentage rises to 94% by the third generation. Thus, if language fluency is a significant barometer of assimilation, the children of immigrants seem to be assimilating into American society at an impressive rate. Moreover, the evidence to support allegations by Minuteman officials regarding the ways in which undocumented persons exploit the U.S. healthcare system appears dubious. Recently, UCLA researchers published an article that studied the use of the U.S. health care system by undocumented Mexicans and other Latino groups. In short, analysts found that undocumented Mexicans utilized fewer health care services than did their U.S.-born counterparts (Ortega, Fang, Perez, Rizzo, Carter-Pokras, Wallace, & Gelberg, 2007). Specifically, the team concluded, “Low rates of use of health care services by Mexican immigrants and similar trends among other Latinos do

2007/08]

BUSTING THE BANDITO BOYZ

23

not support public concern about immigrants' overuse of the healthcare system" (p. 2359).

Despite such persuasive evidence, Minuteman groups persist in spreading untruths about undocumented persons to further their agenda. "The Minuteman Project is dedicated to protecting America against invaders. We can't do it alone," their website exhorts (www.minutemanproject.com/organization/join/asp). Such alarmist rhetoric interweaves patriotism and race-related panic, as America is understood to be fighting for survival against Mestizo alien invaders.

In its idealized form, such an alert also stands as a challenge to the integrity of white manhood: True men stand watch vigilantly to protect the nation. Like other paramilitary outfits, the Minuteman organization operates as if a man's actual worth is measured by his ability to be a warrior for the cause (Kraska, 2001, p. 155). Paradoxically, this warrior status can be had for a discount from MCDC, which will waive their \$50 registration fee for applicants who can demonstrate that they hold a current license to carry a concealed weapon (<https://secure.responseenterprises.com/minutemanhq/registration.php?a=100>).⁴

New volunteers are typically given the opportunity to immerse themselves in Minuteman festivities that celebrate the tracking and capture of undocumented persons. Patriotism and militarism simultaneously lace the public rallies and private gatherings that occur during Minuteman border operations. Perhaps it's the Minuteman compounds that best exemplify the kind of forces shaping fraternal bonds within the Minuteman movement. The Southern Poverty Law Center's article titled "Neo Nazi Leads Recruitment Drive for New Border Militia" described a compound thus:

The desolate compound was saturated with paranoia, military fetishism, and machismo . . . By day two of the Minuteman project, volunteers had taken to calling the college's cafeteria the "mess hall," the dormitories "barracks," and the boundaries of the campus the "perimeter," observed first hand witnesses. (SPLC Intelligence Report, 2005b, p. 2)

These shared understandings of place and space within Minuteman vocabulary bespeak surprising levels of intimacy between and among volunteers. Communicating in a militarized vernacular emulsifies fraternal ties and also underscores the romantic fatalism that punctuates much of Minuteman culture.

Blood and glory notwithstanding, romantic fatalism within the Minuteman movement can be dangerous in the hands of hair-trigger volunteers. For example, armed security teams placed trip flares randomly around the Minuteman compound so night-time intruders could be detected (SPLC

Intelligence Report, 2005b, p. 2). Perhaps akin to mass panic attacks, rumors often spark safety alerts, which in turn provoke compound-wide armed responses from disoriented volunteers. Although these alerts almost always turn out to be false alarms, the fact that volunteers face these phantom threats collectively binds them together powerfully. It may be the case that volunteers see their service in the Minuteman corps as a kind of sacrificial struggle that will eventually add purpose and meaning to their status as white men in a racially changing nation (Rotundo, 1993).

Interestingly, inasmuch as military fetishism reciprocally structures the sexism and racism that animate much of Minuteman culture, non-white and non-male individuals are often aggressively recruited into Minuteman outfits. For the Minuteman group, having non-white members helps them to deflect charges of organized racism. The participation of non-white volunteers allows them to achieve a greater personal profile than they otherwise would have had if left to their own merits (SPLC Intelligence Report, 2006). In other instances, participation permits a collegial bonding with white males that might not otherwise take place, but for their support of the Minuteman's overarching racialized agenda.

Latina/o volunteers might rationalize their own involvement by embracing an unforgiving law-and-order ethos that rejects the plight of undocumented immigrants in favor of law-abiding immigrants that enter the U.S. through conventional means.⁵ Alternatively, native-born Latinas/os may also be participating with Minuteman groups because they privately harbor malicious will against the ancestry or national origin of foreign-born Mestizos. More succinctly, involvement is a way for Latinas/os insecure in their own cultural skins to make important allies in white male communities. Interestingly, women are also welcomed into the Minuteman movement, but they are often relegated to supporting roles such as registering new volunteer applicants or cooking meals at Minuteman encampments.

The involvement of non-white and women volunteers in Minuteman militias does not signify newfound egalitarian principles. Rather, these "non-standard" volunteers must commit themselves to fulfilling the agenda of the Minuteman. Internally and externally, Minuteman activities are intended to safeguard and reify the dominant position of white males relative to non-whites—citizens and non-citizens alike. Within themselves, non-standard volunteers also must be able to reconcile glaring inconsistencies within the Minuteman movement.

Perhaps the most egregious offense is publicly advocating a law-and-order mantra, while privately reveling in racism, lawlessness, and reckless behavior. For example, several recent news stories have documented financial irregularities plaguing the Minuteman leadership. In fact, MCDC president Chris Simcox terminated numerous MCDC leaders because they had

2007/08]

BUSTING THE BANDITO BOYZ

25

requested a meeting with him to discuss their concerns over his handling of MCDC funds (Seper, 2007a). Further, a 1.2 million dollar breach of contract lawsuit against Chris Simcox was filed in May 2007 in Maricopa County Superior Court (Phoenix, Arizona). A retired home builder named James Campbell had donated \$100,000 to assist MCDC in constructing a one-mile-long Israel-style fence along the U.S.-Mexico border to prohibit undocumented crossings (Seper, 2007b). To date, however, only a standard five-strand barbed wire fence has been erected, with no explanation being given for, or obvious progress being made on, a permanent structure (p. A03). Apparently, Mr. Campbell felt compelled to sue MCDC because he believed that its leadership had intentionally misled him regarding the fence project. Additionally, an MCDC Political Action Committee (PAC) that had raised more than \$300,000 gave less than 3% of it to political campaigns (Seper, 2007c). FEC reports indicate that the lion's share of cash went into operating expenses or cash-on-hand reserves (p. A04). Finally, MCDC has long-time organizational ties with suspect charitable organizations like the Declaration Foundation (DF). In December 2006, the DF was fined for and prohibited from soliciting donations by the Pennsylvania Bureau of Charitable Organizations for, among other things, making false statements to solicit donations and withholding documents from an investigative subpoena (Seper, 2006).

Non-standard volunteers likely come to terms with these ethical shortcomings by adopting an unquestioning attitude and rock-solid allegiance to the Minuteman leadership. Relatedly, the involvement of non-standard volunteers is welcomed so long as those volunteers demand no real power or say within the organization. If they are given some organizational authority, it is with the understanding that white males will oversee their decisions. Thus, their work is permanently etched with supremacist rhetoric that glorifies white manhood. Ultimately, much of what the Minuteman is about concerns racism and domination. For members of this group, policing the border is oddly therapeutic: It reassures these white men that they are still important and still in charge. Exposing this malicious canon might help curb the pervasive racism and violence that make these boyz such banditos.

NOTES

1. My use of journalistic references is intended only to frame broader issues involving race, masculinity, and militarism—the main elements upon which this article focuses. I have tried to rely principally on Minuteman documents as much as possible to ensure an authentic organizational voice.

2. On file with author.

3. The Minuteman Pledge can be found at http://www.minutemanhq.com/hq/borderops_pledge.php

4. Since this article was written the registration link has been changed. Also, the site no longer offers a membership fee waiver for demonstrable concealed weapons permits.

5. Two Latina/o oriented examples of this anti-immigrant sentiment include www.dontspeakforme.org/ourstory.html and the Latina Minuteman sympathizer, Rosanna Pulido, at www.vivirlatino.com/2007/02/13/the-latina-minuteman.php

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2007/08]

BUSTING THE BANDITO BOYZ

27

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2007/08]

BUSTING THE BANDITO BOYZ

29

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