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# Constitutive walls: The U.S.-Mexico border fence and constructing identity

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Constitutive Walls:

The US/Mexico Border Fence and Constructing Identity

(TITLE)

BY

Marcy Katherine Klipp

**THESIS**

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
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**Constitutive Walls:  
The US/Mexico Border Fence and Constructing  
Identity**

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this thesis is to contribute to the growing literature of constitutive rhetoric, originally coined by Maurice Charland. Through a case study of the US/Mexico border fence, I illustrate that the communicative tactics of articulation, appropriation and image events have the potential to act as interpellative strategies of identity construction. Through my analysis, I show how these strategies function in constitutive rhetoric in both verbal discourses and in visual rhetoric through image events. I also note that the lack of discourses in an argument may have implications that are equally significant to those that are present.



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For me, this thesis represents more than a completed project and an M.A. after my name. It is a confirmation of my character, my will and my goals. The decision to pursue a master's degree was not an easy one, as life and fate have the most ironic sense of humor. I knew from the start that there would be nothing easy about the two years I was committing myself, and my family to, but I was also confident and continually reassured that this was, quite simply, a path I had to take. I would like to take a moment to thank those who have supported me and have helped to make my accomplishment possible.

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**Chapter 1:  
Introduction**

In August, 2007, former Speaker of the House, Newt Gingrich, spoke at the Ames, Iowa Straw Poll about the need for legislation requiring anyone arrested for a felony to be checked for legal status. He cited an incident in Newark, New Jersey, where an illegal immigrant shot four American college students. He pleads with his supportive audience, saying, “[i]magine that those four college students had been your children. Imagine they’d been your nieces or nephews.... We cannot expect Mayor Booker to defend Newark if the government of the United States does not defend America and we need to win the war at home fully as much as we need to win the war overseas” (Newt.org). These remarks, and others throughout the speech, act to situate the audience into a discourse on immigration policy. Here, Gingrich is creating the possibility for the construction of an ideal ideological audience that is identified by fear for its safety, as well as indignant toward its government for failing to protect it. His rhetoric serves to motivate Congress to act, but also to unify the audience into acting. This speech is just one in a rapidly growing discourse about immigration policy, particularly about the need for the construction of US/Mexico border fence which is aimed to protect American citizens by keeping undocumented immigrants from entering the country.

In a heated debate such as this, it is necessary to gain the support of those who are presumed to have the power of support and/or change: the people who are affected by it, and those who vote. Maurice Charland’s theory of constitutive rhetoric is an appropriate lens to view the issue of the immigration, particularly in the matter of the construction of the border fence, as I will detail the manner in which groups and individuals are positioned, interpellated, and discursively constructed in such a way that they may be subjugated and therefore constituted into a desired identity. Through this construction,

they are then able to be motivated toward a specific desired action, such as voting a particular way, donating money, or going to war. Drawing and expanding on Burke's notions of rhetorical identification and persuasion, Charland also further develops Black's notions of the way the ideal ideological image of an audience is created by generating the conditions for the possibility of constructing the identity of that audience (Jasinski 107).

Charland takes Black's second persona a step farther, suggesting that the existence of social subjects – those who would be an audience – is the result of discourse. Identification with a group is, as Burke suggests, not necessarily the result of intentional persuasion to a specific end, but through rhetorical recognition (133). Before subjects may be persuaded, they must necessarily identify with the ideologies present in the argument. According to Charland, the mere act of addressing is rhetorical (138). He explains this complicated notion through Althusser's discussion of interpellation, arguing:

Interpellation occurs at the very moment one enters into a rhetorical situation, that is, as soon as an individual recognizes and acknowledges being addressed. An interpellated subject participates in the discourse that addresses him...this rhetoric of identification is...usually part of a rhetoric of socialization. (138)

Althusser relates the experience of interpellation to that of "hailing." He analogizes a scenario of a policeman shouting, "hey you!" as an individual walks down the street. If the individual hears the call and turns to respond, that moment of recognition is the moment when the individual not only enters the discourse as an active participant, but also as the subject of it (163).

Constitutive rhetoric, then, *awakens* the possibilities for identification in the discourses. It is necessary that the audience previously hold the ideals of the rhetoric, which is to say, the discourse does not *create* an identity, but rather makes possible the means for realizing it. For instance, a television commercial selling a product “manages not only to sell its product but also to energize certain identity possibilities as it positions its audience in the role of ‘consumers.’ *We become* consumers, or we are (re)positioned in the role of consumers, as we are addressed by the commercial” (Jasinski 107).

Advertising offers an excellent simple example of constitutive rhetoric, as it works to address the audience as deficient in some quality – such as liberty or freedom – which is easily remedied by the consumption of material goods. However, on a larger, perhaps more significant scale, constitutive rhetoric also has the ability to go beyond merely constituting a passive individual into an energized consumer, but may also transform a collection of individuals into a unified, cohesive group.

In order to accomplish the group’s cohesiveness, Charland notes that narrative is necessary to construct a history for the new collective identity. He explains that, as the “people” that is created through interpellation is a persona, which exists in rhetoric, and is made “real” by the ontological function of narratives, and “they constitute subjects as they present a particular textual position the locus for action and experience” (138-139). He explains that narrative form provides continuity over time, saying,

Texts are but surfaces; characters...*seem* real through textual operations. The distinct acts and events in a narrative become linked through identification arising from the narrative form. Narratives lead us to construct and fill in coherent unified

subjects out of temporally and spatially separate events. This renders the site of action and experience stable. (139, emphasis in original)

The seemingly simple narrative is charged with ideology as it is necessarily created and brimming with discourses and culture, and the subjectivities within it are contingent and socially bound by language. Essentially, the narrative unites the people with a common history, banding them together in their past, which gives rise to the ideologies of the present and future, and moves the people toward a popular goal. I believe Charland explains this rather aptly, saying:

To tell the story...is implicitly to assert the existence of a collective subject. The protagonist of the historical drama, who experiences, suffers, and acts. Such a narrative renders the world of events understandable with respect to transcendental collective interests that negates individual interest. (139)

The concerns and interests of the individual are swallowed up in the interests of the “people.” They are brought together by their shared past which gives them the vested stake in the future.

As Charland notes, constitutive rhetoric “inscribes real social actors within its textualized structure of motives, and then inserts them into the world of practice” (142). An audience, then, becomes a “people” (139), those with a shared history and collective interest. They are created for a purpose, constituted for a “teleological movement” with a desired goal in mind (144). The narrative of the people creates “the illusion of merely revealing a unified and unproblematic subjectivity, are ideological, because they occult the importance of discourse, culture and history in giving rise to subjectivity, “ (139). By

telling the story of a people, a people come to be (140). Suddenly, “I,” becomes “we;” “me,” “he,” and “she” combines to form an infinitely more powerful “us.”

It is important to shed light on the nature of this constitution of subjects because as we identify ourselves, we act and encourage action that supports the ideologies that the unified group presumably embraces. The effects are not contained to the mindsets of those in the group, however, as they have material consequences, such as the added step of constituted subjects voting for politicians that claim to hold a similar agenda, who then affect national and international relations. The nature of humanity and society will inevitably be altered, and as history has shown us, segregation has an assured consequence of propagating fear and distrust.

Once individuals recognize their membership in the discourse, the rhetoric may then motivate them to action (142). For example, should an individual be interpellated and recognize herself as a “proud American,” finding she possesses the ideologies that cause her to view the walls as necessary to protect her freedom, property, safety, and happiness, then the discourses surrounding (that is, the discourses with a major focus on the construction and fortification and enforcement of) the wall may move her to go forth and participate. She may be motivated to join the Minutemen, campaign for pro-wall candidates or issues, give money to the cause, or simply vote according to the group’s/her ideals.

In the matter of the US/Mexico border fence, I have found that constitutive rhetoric is the keystone of rhetorical practices taking place in the heated debate. It is necessary and imperative to examine those texts that I will detail throughout this project, as it will become clear that many of the subjectivities and the manner in which they are



created, are – or have the potential to be – quite problematic. Philip Wander gives great import and heady responsibility to the scholar who goes beyond simply analyzing a text for its artistic merit, but challenges the context and conditions that created it and then judges that text for its significance and contribution in the shaping of a social world. I see many discouraging and concerning patterns arising in the debate surrounding the construction of the border fence – from both sides of the argument. There are brief, glimmering moments of positive potential, as well. This matter is complex and volatile, and rapidly growing in dangerous consequences. There are concerns for safety, a nation's integrity, lives, and those who willingly put themselves at risk; national and foreign policy, and humanity are no small matters, and they are all encapsulated within this singular issue symbolized by the raising and fortification of a wall.

My aim in this thesis is to contribute to the growing literature on constitutive rhetoric. A number of scholars have utilized this lens in their analyses of a wide variety of social movements, as this tactic is popular in the constitution of an ideologically ideal audience. Michael Leff and Ebony A. Utley display how constitutive rhetoric was used in Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter from Birmingham Jail," saying that in King's endeavors to persuade an audience and alter attitudes, he constructed his own identity, influenced the construction of the identities of his audience, and provided the model and initiative for black readers to become effective actors in the civil rights movement.

In her article, "'Acting as Freeman': Rhetoric, Race and Reform in the Debate Over Colonization in *Freedom's Journal*, 1827-1828," Jacqueline Bacon shows how the African-American contributors of the *Freedom's Journal* used constitutive rhetoric to "reconstitute the material world' and to 'insert' themselves as 'subjects-as-agents into

the world” (77). She explains that, by opening up the possibilities for new identity construction, the African-American anti-colonizationists motivated a movement of embracing agency and self-definition.

Some authors look to the theory to illustrate unsuccessful texts, as well. For instance, Kenneth S. Zagacki uses Charland’s theory to illustrate George W. Bush’s failures in constitutive rhetoric, opening up a discussion about what he refers to as “constitutive paradoxes” (273). He suggests that Bush’s attempts at formulating a collective “we” between the United States and Iraq failed as he did not account for the national and group identities of his foreign audience, thereby opening himself and his policies up to considerable critique.

Helen Tate also looks at failed constitutive practices in the rhetorical unity of “sisterhood” and claim of feminist identity in her article, “The Ideological Effects of a Failed Constitutive Rhetoric: The Co-option of the Rhetoric of White Lesbian Feminism.” Just as Zagacki notes, the presented attempts of constitutive rhetoric not only fail to form an ideological identity, but also have significant implication in the public arena, opening the movement up to serious critique.

In a somewhat similar fashion, Derek Sweet and Margret McCue-Enser analyze the rhetoric of Barack Obama. They suggest that his constitution of “the people” utilizes Charland’s constitutive rhetoric to influence the creation of a group of motivated populace, encouraged toward progress and action through collaborative identity performance. However, they argue that Obama’s explanation of an “imperfect people” suggests that the audience is never fully constituted, but constantly engaged in the act of

constitution, as their flaws keep them in a continuous quest for perfection, thereby, never allowing them to fully realize their idealized identity.

Constitutive rhetoric is also combined with similar theories to present a new argument. One such example is Sara R. Stein, who also uses Charland's constitutive rhetoric but combines it with the analysis of ideological codes found in advertising to perform a critical analysis of Machintosh's "1984" commercial. She argues that the ad, while suggesting a rhetoric of freedom and revolution, is merely constituting individuals into consumers who are being motivated to continue capitalist investment in technology.

Michael J. Lee takes Charland's constitutive rhetoric and combines it with Kenneth Burke's notions of identity and scapegoating to explain the manner in which the constructions of identity by a particular group simultaneously constructs the identity of the "rhetorical opposite." Through Burke, he explains that, as a rhetor constitutes his/her own identity and the identity of the ideal audience by detailing what the group is, he/she is necessarily outlining what those who lie outside the group are *not*. This practice, then, opens up the possibility for a "point-to-able" scapegoat (359).

Much like this project, Michael S. Bruner looks to a wall as constitutive rhetoric. In his article, "Symbolic Uses of the Berlin Wall, 1961-1989," he explains that the wall in Berlin had become a symbolic icon. However, he explains that the wall is used in the rhetorical texts he examines as a symbol of national and foreign policy, whereas I will illustrate how the US/Mexico border fence is spoken about and utilized in the construction of the identities of the speakers/actors and others.

My contribution to the literature of constitutive rhetoric is in my consideration that the practices of articulation, appropriation, and image events are utilized as strategies

of constitutive rhetoric and interpellation. While some of the authors I detailed above provide examples of these, they do not account for them as specific to the designs in the constructions of identity and subjectivities. My case study of the US/Mexico border fence provides an illustration of how these strategies play, particularly in the discourses of immigration.

In communication studies, we have vast amounts of scholarship about immigration discourse (Ono and Sloop; Holling; Flores), however, there does not appear to be much discussion specifically about the wall being constructed. This is a fitting contribution to the present literature as helps to not only put the wall into context, but also aids in understanding the possible and complex relationship between the material and rhetoric. In this thesis, I will demonstrate how the construction and presence of the US/Mexico border fence influences the possibilities for identity constitution.

The history of the Arizona/Mexico border is one of many sordid details. In the first chapter of her book, *Borderlands*, Gloria Anzaldua outlines a long history of the Aztecas. She begins with the original inhabitants migrating across the Bering Straits and finding their home in the south. In lengthy detail, she recounts the Anglo invasions beginning in the 1800's, with the first infamous border fence rising in 1848, leaving 100,000 Mexican citizens annexed along with their land (29). As the land is altered into an unnatural state, so is the lived experience of its natives, with racism abounding and affecting into a war between those who live on the land, and those who want it. The depletion of the native population leaves them nearly defenseless, but life on the Mexican side of the border offers them few options, as economic circumstances in Mexico push them to return to their homeland, only to be killed or deported.

Wendy Brown describes the border fence as the separation of the Global North from the Global South, and concerned with the illegal flows of drugs and humans heading north. The fence was “born out of tension between the needs of North American capital and popular antagonism toward migration...and the demographics and cultures composing and in some eyes decomposing the nation” (Brown 36). The landscape has become a scene of lawlessness, and the fence is erected “in the face of this ungovernability” (Brown 23). Brown explains that the wall also symbolizes the shady divide between internal and external policing (24), and she rather astutely observes that,

[t]his, in turn, suggests an increasingly blurred distinction between the inside and outside of a nation itself, and not only between criminals within and enemies without...Thus, one irony of late modern walling is that a structure taken to mark and enforce an inside/outside distinction...appears as precisely the opposite when grasped as part of a complex of eroding lines between the police and the military...law and lawlessness. (25)

One side of this debate argues for amnesty while the other argues for the integrity of a nation. The physical presence of the fence is the driving force behind the rhetoric while some argue for more and solid construction, and still others argue against it entirely.

Because immigration appears to be problematic, for some, to the national identity and the preservation of America’s culture and sovereignty, it is necessary to look to the physical existence of walls, which are instrumental in creating ideologies and identities. Celeste Condit-Railsback, in her article, “Beyond Rhetorical Relativism: A Structural-Material Model of Truth and Objective Reality” discusses the subjective nature of language, saying, “...human beings create whatever truth exists through rhetoric, and

there are no universal standards of knowledge external to active, speaking, human beings” (352). Truth, therefore, is contingent upon language.

Material conditions, however, can constrain us rhetorically. Condit Railsback uses the rather fitting example of a wall: “I believe that an objective entity, ‘wall’ exists and I do not try to walk through walls. My language has a word for walls, in part, because walls objectively exist and constrain my life. Because language is a tool of rhetoric, my rhetoric will be affected by the existence of the word ‘walls’” (353). Essentially, there is only so much our bodies can do, and despite all the rhetorical tools available to us, none will allow us to break the objective reality, or walk through walls.

In her book *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty*, Wendy Brown highlights this irony by looking at the matter from the angle of those who are at issue with the eroding state sovereignty. “Notwithstanding their strikingly physicalist and obdurate dimensions...walls often function theatrically, projecting power and efficaciousness that they do not and cannot actually exercise and that they also performatively contradict” (25).

However, Condit Railsback explains “rhetoric responds to material conditions and attempts to adjust the language net (attempts to express ‘truths’), because it must meld material conditions and the structure of the language network” (361). Rhetoric can, then, force a difference in cultural understanding. For example, the difference between the terms “rape” and “consensual sex.” The material act of rape has remained the same throughout the ages, but our linguistic understanding of it is shaped and advanced by conceptualizing it through a new, identifying term.

Right and wrong are socially subjective, created, and recreated notions derived from current “consensus.” As reality is continually changing, so necessarily is truth, making the notion entirely contingent. Condit Railsback makes a case stating that truth is a reality through consensus. Basically, when an issue is no longer debated, it can be assumed that consensus has been reached, and the matter has become a truth of the times (360). Therefore, as the southern border fence discussed in this project is a controversial matter at the moment, it cannot be considered “truth” and is therefore open to critique.

Rhetoric can also alter material conditions, “in response to linguistic conditions of related material conditions...the passage of law, the appropriation of funds, or the launching of battle ships...” (361). To continue the rape analogy, the linguistic understanding of rape has resulted in the creation of material laws. Therefore, rhetoric, objective reality, and objective truth all affect one another through constraints and opening up new liberties. This illustrates the notion that rhetoric has material consequences – in this case, the erecting of a physical wall; and that wall, then, has rhetorical consequences. In this thesis, I will examine the verbal discourses that provide multiple arguments about the wall, as well as the image events taking place at the material structure, and I will make a case that, just as the fence is constructed and challenged for ideological purposes, so too are peoples constituted by the same ideological presuppositions. The strategies of articulation, appropriation and image events are complicit in the process of identity constitution, working individually, or simultaneously in the verbal and visual texts that I will provide in the following chapters.

## **Strategies of Constitution**

### *Articulation*

As I mentioned, the interpellation of subjects is the first necessary step of constitutive rhetorical practices. The strategies of this interpellation, then, require some in-depth examination. Language is arguably the most powerful resource that we, as humans, have. It is how we think, communicate, relate with one another and understand the world. Language is foremost a social process. We are able to create understandings by making connections – links – to different things – people, ideas, events, etc. Through these connections, we are able to articulate certain understandings; attaching significance or meaning to things, in order that they may be understood or viewed in a particular light. Laclau and Mouffe define articulation as “any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice” (105). They discuss at length the process and complexities of articulation, stating:

If we consider social relations as discursively constructed, contradiction becomes possible....and hence a major enlargement of the field of those categories which can account for social relations. Synonymy, metonymy, metaphor are not forms of thought that add a second sense to a primary, constitutive literality of social relations; instead, they are part of the primary terrain itself in which the social is constituted. (110)

Kevin Michael DeLuca helps to clarify this complicated concept in his article, “Articulation Theory: A Discursive Grounding for Rhetorical Practice,” where he explains that,



essentially, the elements of an artifact exist as signifiers previous to articulation, however, they may be linked in a discourse that alters their character and creates a new understanding. Through articulation, we are able to shape and necessarily reshape our reality by creating or severing these connections. Stuart Hall analogizes this notion of articulation to that of a truck and its trailer. The two are linked together via a hitch (the conjuncture) to create a new and useful mover (the formation). However, the trailer may be disconnected and a new trailer hitched to the engine, creating something entirely new.

This analogy is illustrative of the fact that articulations are, indeed, a social process. There is nothing inherent in the meanings we ascribe to things, people, events, etc., as they are contingent and constantly changing. We may attribute an understanding to something, but in time, that understanding may be altered or removed.

This process is also incredibly useful in rhetorical constructions. We may link two things – events, for instance – in order to generate and reshape an understanding of those events, people, ideas, etc. A clear example of this is the connection created using the horrific events of September 11, 2001 and the concerns over illegal immigration. The anti-immigration rhetoric does not simply make parallels of the two, but fuses them together to make them one in the same. Suddenly, 9/11 and border security are a single issue, and undocumented immigrants *become* terrorists.

There are two forms of discursive articulation: diachronic and synchronic, both of which are constitutive in nature. Diachronic articulation is the linking of past and present. By establishing a connection between events found in history to what is currently taking place, advocates have the ability to forge, not only a new understanding of both, but also create the common history that binds individuals into a “people.” They may see

themselves and their conditions in what happened in the past and see it as taking place in the present. Remembering September 11<sup>th</sup> recalls feelings of fear and paranoia, but also unity and national spirit. By articulating that day with the present matter of immigration and the US border, “the people” is created with a common history, interpellated as fearful but spirited fighters. The undocumented immigrants, at the same time, are linked to and constructed as the terrorists hell-bent on destroying them.

Synchronic articulation, then, is the connection between two things existing in the present. One effective way of accomplishing this type of articulation is through the use of metaphors. Robert Ivie explains that a metaphor can serve as a nomenclature that can direct attention toward a certain thing, and “[e]laborating a primary image into a well formed argument provides a motive, or interpretation of reality, with which the intended audience is invited to identify” (167). The metaphor does not need to provide an accurate or literal description, because it gains legitimacy by allowing us more freedom of expression and conceptualization (Donofrio 156). The use of metaphor can open up a number of possibilities in the rhetoric, and can necessarily identify a subject as the term that it is imagined to be, thereby becoming quite “real” in our perception of reality (Ivie 167). It is a thin and potentially ominous line, as this rhetorical tactic has the ability to not only enable certain behaviors, but may also limit certain responses (Donofrio 156).

For example, in his article, “The Significance of the Skin as a Natural Boundary in the Sub-Division of Psychology,” author Robert Farr introduces the concept of skin as a natural boundary. It is both a very real material barrier and a social metaphor that serves to distinguish individuals from one another, suggesting that

the skin acts as a visual metaphor for the separation between other people's actions and the inferences that we draw about the internal states that give rise to, accompany or are the consequences of those actions...The importance of the skin as part of psychological discourse is that it draws attention back to the corporeal, and to action. It reminds us that the surface of the skin, or what people do, is as important as what lies beneath the skin; that is, the world of the subjective.

(Collett 373)

Our skin, then, serves as a metaphor for identity, and is a symbol often found in the discourses of social and racial politics. As I will explain later in Chapter 2, it is also attached to notions of bloodlines and family, and particularly the constitutive construction of what the US national identity *looks like* – who does or does not belong.

When speaking about matters of national borders and immigration, legal or otherwise, one cannot ignore the implications of skin and race relations, particularly the notion of whiteness.. Throughout the next two chapters, I will delve into accounts of race and the construction of subjectivities created because of it.

Aimee Carrillo Row and Sheena Malhotra explain that “whiteness” “may be understood as a process of universalizing, through which white identity is inaugurated as the standard for radicalizing matrices - all radicalized locations are compared to white identity” (“(Un)hinging Whiteness” 168). The “everydayness” of whiteness helps to create a cloak of invisibility, as it is difficult to identify because we are not constantly aware of it (Nakayama and Krizek 296). In their article, “Whiteness: A Strategic Rhetoric,” Nakayama and Krizek, also look at “whiteness,” arguing that people who identify as “white” have not yet performed an analysis on how, why, or where they are in

relation to the “center” of power in society (291), and therefore, it assumes a position that is neither recognized, but assumes unquestioned authority. They argue, then, that “whiteness” needs to be explored, saying:

[T]he social location of “whiteness” is perceived as if it had a normative essence. It is important that we acknowledge that “the radicality or conservatism of essentialism depends, to a significant degree, on *who* is utilizing it, *how* it is deployed, and *where* its effects are concentrated” (Fuss 20). By viewing whiteness as a rhetorical construction, we avoid searching for any essential nature to whiteness...the invisibility of whiteness has been manifested through its universality. The universality of whiteness resides in its already defined position as everything...Thus, the experiences and communication patterns of whites are taken as the norm from which Others are marked. (293 emphasis in original)

Because whiteness is invisible, the constitutive construction of race abounds with little to no attention given to the position of whites, particularly white males. In chapter 2, I will point out clear moments when the unspoken whiteness is present and I will take a critical look into the implications of such language arising in a discourse about national identity. However, as Carrillo Rowe and Malhotra explain, the process of unhinging, or perhaps, examining and criticizing the assumed privilege that comes with being white is necessary to open the possibilities for antiracism and self-knowledge. This process of unhinging requires two steps: first, one must subscribed to anti-racist ideologies and commit to the practices and relationships that they entail. It is necessary to consider how individuals are constituted by their skin, and to form anti-racist affiliations for the purpose of social

justice. Second, they must un hinge or disconnect the articulation of whiteness and white identity (169-170). They also make sure to point out that:

Whiteness produces white identity through conformity, which produces sameness. Whiteness as an ideological formation, however, is not only productive of white identity; it is productive of a whole range of (de)radicalized identities. If it constitutes white identity through sameness, it constitutes radicalized identity through difference. Those bodies, affects, performances, social locations, and political/politicized mobilizations which defy, disrupt, and/or challenge whiteness are racially constituted through their differentiation from the ideals of whiteness.

(168)

Therefore, while the invisibility of whiteness has the potential to mark racial Others, those who are scrutinizing and challenging the process of white privilege are similarly constituted by their deviation from the unsaid social norm. For instance, in Chapter 3, I have taken an interest in a group of white activists who appear to do the same thing, by calling attention to themselves in the social world of race.

As I mentioned earlier, these understandings may be created and reshaped, as they are not static. Rhetorical articulations are utilized by advocates to bring about social change through the way we comprehend our reality, as they find new links and connections that bring about a new way of viewing that reality.

### *Appropriation*

In order to form a challenging new understanding, advocates appropriate existing notions that may not relate, or may even contend the cultural symbol they are seeking to

change. This is a particularly effective method of resistance, as it provides a new understanding in a provocative way, constructing the symbol in a manner that resists the current understanding, allowing it to be read in a new, opposing light. Robert Weimann explains the contribution of the concept of appropriation as

denoting some social and temporal kind of activity which precedes the problematic of both the subject and the sign. As against both the classical-romantic view of the text as the purely referential activity of some reflecting subject and the (seemingly opposite) view of the text as some autonomous locus of self-determining differentials or epistemes, the concept of appropriation may...help us to focus on the changeful constellations of the contradiction itself between whatever extralinguistic activity and whatever intralinguistic difference engage in the process of representation. (432)

Here, Weimann explains that the relationship between subject and sign has the potential to be more complex than it is traditionally held to be. The ideas of meaning as inherent and meaning as constructed through language are not necessarily a binary, as he sees a text as essentially encapsulating both notions, providing an opportunity for more nuanced insight.

For example, in Chapter 3, I will provide an analysis of graffiti found on the Mexico side of the constructed border fence. The messages written on the structure outwardly contend it, and the fact that it is written on the fence, itself, offers a direct challenge. The artists have, thereby, appropriated the fence for their rhetoric, as if to say, “yes, it is YOUR wall, and this is what WE think of it.” The understanding of the wall as protection and American strength is then being confronted and undeniably defied by

literally tagging it with the rhetoric of the opposition. This example is constitutive, as I will explain that the graffiti text constructs America and Americans in a particular subjectivity, and Mexicans and the anonymous artists in a similar fashion. This text also serves to synchronically rearticulate the constructed fence, by severing it from the understanding of American strength and linking it to American oppression.

### *Image Events*

The example of graffiti found on the border fence is a poignant case of wanting to be heard, but lacking in voice. Even in this age of instant accessibility to vast, unimaginable amounts of information, it is still the case that only a select few control the public dominant discourses. As such, people often find that activism and protest are an effective and perhaps satisfying mode of putting their voice into the public arena.

In her article, “The Aesthetics of Protest,” Rebecca Jones suggests that protest and the creation of image events is more complex than simply using the same means of projecting a message than is used by those who influence the dominant ideology:

The idea that contemporary activists use images precisely because they offer an alternative means to allow their concerns to enter public discourses – especially conversations counter to the discourses that surround capitalism, authoritarianism, or militarism...the use of images and image events offers a more flexible tool than traditional civic participation or even traditional protest practices...for the incorporation of embodied and material discourses and “non-market” values like peace, justice, and caring into larger public discourses on political and social topics...Through these events, activists draw nearer to

realizing...[an] ideal version of an equitable democracy where all citizens and their experiences contribute to public discourse and consequential political acts.

(Jones “The Aesthetics of Protest”)

Groups and individuals take to the streets, often literally, forcing their way into a public space and into the public consciousness. According to Jones, activists view public discourses more like a conversation instead of an ultimatum, and they seize the opportunity to contribute to those discourses and have their voices be heard.

In his book, *Image Politics*, Kevin Michael DeLuca quotes Robert Hunter, former director of Greenpeace who coined the phrase “mind-bombs” meaning, “an image event that explodes ‘in the public’s consciousness to transform the way people view their world’” (1). Here, DeLuca centers a large portion of his argument around Marshall McLuhan’s famous phrase, “The medium is the message.” He explains this emerging premise,

...Hunter argued that all revolutions are attempts to change the consciousness of the “enemy,” and ...the mass media provide a delivery system for strafing the population with “mind bombs”... This philosophy of mass media has translated into a practice of staging image events based on the argument that “when you do an action, it goes through the camera and into the minds of millions of people.

The things that were previously out of mind now become commonplace.

Therefore, you use the media as a weapon.” (4)

However, as DeLuca explains, the mission may not succeed in its immediate goals of change. He quotes from a veteran Greenpeace campaigner, who rather aptly noted that, “with image events it ‘is not whether they immediately stop the evil – they seldom do.



Success comes in reducing a complex set of issues to symbols that break people's comfortable equilibrium, get them asking whether there are better ways to do things" (2-3).

It should be clearly noted, here, that my use of "mind-bombs...exploding in the public consciousness" does not imply that image events have any sort of "hypodermic needle" effect. The notion of rhetorical force dictates that once a message is released, it is out of the rhetor's control, and cannot be interpreted *for* anyone who receives it. That is to say, whatever happens, happens. The utilization of image events is to trouble dominant ideologies and discourses and raise awareness of opposing ideas and beliefs. They make that which was previously unthought-of all but unavoidable as they are staged in the public sphere.

### **Lack of Arguments**

In the next two chapters, I will examine a variety of texts found in the discourses about the construction of the US/Mexico border fence, and in the image events that are staged to force disenfranchised voices to be heard. I have included examples from the verbal discourses, such as speeches given in favor of the fence, as well as media texts found in journalism and in the public arena of the internet. However, as Michael Calvin McGee explains, a text is never actually complete, wrapped within the bounds of beginning to end. Instead, he explains:

Critical rhetoric does not begin with a finished text in need of interpretation; rather, texts are understood to be larger than the apparently finished discourse that presents itself as transparent. The apparently finished discourse is in fact a dense

reconstruction of all the bits of other discourses from which it was made. It is fashioned from what we can call “fragment.” Further, whether we conceive it in an Aristotelian sense as the art of persuasion, or in a Burkean sense as the social process of identification, rhetoric is influential. That is, the rhetor understands that discourse anticipates its utility in the world, inviting its own critique (the interpretation and appropriation of its meaning. (279)

To put it simply, McGee is saying that a text is never complete because it is merely a fragment of an entire web of context, from the historic, into the present, and continues into the future. One must examine multiple discourses and contexts, as well, and only then, can a scholar gain the most well-rounded insight possible. Notably, however, never a completed picture.

When considering the broader picture of context and fragmentation, one must also scrutinize what is not said in the discourse, or to put it another way, what is missing. Raymie E. McKerrow explains that this is significant, as “in the formation of a text, out of fragments of what is said, the resulting ‘picture’ needs to be checked against ‘what is absent’ as well as what is present” (107). That is to say that the absence of an argument is every bit as important as those that are present. Consider a jigsaw puzzle. If a text is but one tiny piece among countless other pieces that make a whole picture, it is necessary to turn your attention to the holes, or missing pieces. Those holes are significant in a way that speaks just as loudly as those that are literally voiced.

Therefore, in chapter 2 and 3, I will draw attention to the present discourses and analyze the constructed subjectivities that are articulated throughout mediated texts, but I

will also pay close attention to that which is notably absent from the discourse. These holes have significant implications that require investigation and contribute to the broader context just as much as what is actually articulated.

In chapter 2, I will be looking at verbal discourses surrounding the wall. Here, I will provide a detailed analysis of the use of metaphors and what they not only make capable for the rhetor and his/her supporters, but what they also make impossible for those who may oppose the ideologies found in the text. I have come to the conclusion that many of these metaphors carry with them potentially dangerous suggestion that goes far beyond a clever turn of phrase. Appeals to emotions tap the fears and heartstrings of audiences everywhere, and both sides of the argument similarly utilize pragmatic approaches to the matter in an attempt to convey the “right” way to view and deal with undocumented border crossing. Lastly, it is important to note what is conspicuously missing from the discourse and the implications of that absence. Both sides create arguments for what America is and is not, and both make compelling cases that are indisputably constitutive in manner.

Chapter 3, then, will look not necessarily at *what* is said, but *how* it is said. By examining image events taking place at the physical wall that is at the center of debate, I have found fascinating contributions to the discourses that revolve mainly around articulation and the use of appropriation. It is necessary to look at who is participating in these acts and the acts, themselves, to appreciate what a monumental impact the construction of the border fence has had on culture and the social consequences to both sides. Words are replaced with faces and images, and manage to present arguments that are equally compelling to those discussed in chapter 2. What is also interesting is the way

in which the physical structure of the fence is appropriated into the image event, begging the question of whose fence is it, and what does it mean to whom? Through and through, however, constitutive rhetoric plays its part, interpellating audiences, creating the possibilities for identity construction, and motivating newly formed subjectivities into motion.

Chapter 4 will finally discuss my conclusions and findings , providing examples and a discussion on the material consequences of rhetoric – most notably, the erection of a wall. An explanation of the constitution of subjects and possible consequences of these constitutions, and a number of my own propositions for dealing with these will round out this project. I begin, however, with the most prominent and widely disseminated texts to explore – the verbal discourses surrounding the matter of the border fence.

**Chapter 2:  
Verbal Discourses**

In surveying a wide selection of texts illustrating the discourses surrounding the walls, I found three very different positions in the discussion. The first two are obvious: for and against. Both of these center on the border fence separating the U.S. from its southern neighbor, Mexico. These arguments contain their own themes, which I will elaborate on in detail within this chapter. The arguments in support of the border fence are a concept of sovereignty (this is our land, which grants us our rights, and *they* do not belong), criminality (concerned with violence, drug and sex trafficking), and the disintegration of the American culture. The themes surrounding the arguments against the border fence are opposition to racism and pro-human rights, the expense and ineffectiveness of the construction, and environmentalist concerns. The third position is quite simply, a lack of position, or no discourse at all, as with the case of the northern border.

The United State shares roughly 2,000 miles of hotly contested borderland with Mexico. While statistics vary between popular sources, the Department of Homeland Security estimates that the population of undocumented immigrants living in the United States in January, 2009 (new numbers expected with 2010 census publication) totaled 10.8 million. The report states that, “Between 2000 and 2009, the unauthorized population grew by 27 percent. Of all unauthorized immigrants living in the United States in 2009, 63 percent entered before 2000, and 62 percent were from Mexico” (Department of Homeland Security). The United States Census Bureau totals the 2010 resident population to be just shy of 309 million.

The United States government and citizens have taken it upon themselves to erect a 2,000 mile wall intended to keep immigrants out. Currently, the structure varies from areas of solid concrete to galvanized fence posts. Some line the edges of the border with razor wire and hidden cameras, or all sizes of homemade construction, and some areas are guarded by nothing more than good faith. The idea behind the wall is claimed to be fortification of rights and safety – it is asserted to be an icon of strength and sovereignty. Though one could argue quite ironically that the very presence of the wall seems to argue for a condition that is quite the opposite.

Nevertheless, the arguments for and against the construction of the U.S.-Mexico border fence require audiences that subscribe to the ideologies of the groups that created them. Maurice Charland explains that constitutive rhetoric may be used to recognize an identity in an audience through the act of interpellation, and then bond the individuals to form a community. Through the use of interpellation, the community is gathered around a collective history of shared interests and values, leading the rhetoric to necessarily require a narrative. Arguably, one of the most compelling stories told is that of good and evil, the righteous hero triumphing over the ignoble opportunistic foe. “The people” are saved.

### **Arguments for the Fence**

[www.usborderpatrol.com](http://www.usborderpatrol.com) is a website that is no exception to the lure of constitutive rhetoric. This site is created by a group of private, anonymous *supporters* of the U.S. Border Patrol, but notably, not a faction of – or endorsed by – the actual government agency, despite the fact that they refer to themselves as the U.S. Border

Patrol in the title of their website, and the occasional use of “we” found in their rhetoric. Charland reminds us that constitutive rhetoric does not create an identity, but rather calls attention to, or recognizes an identity that already exists. This website provides an excellent example of the effectiveness of this interpellation, as it is created by an audience that has already been interpellated as “supporters” of the U.S. Border Patrol, and has been motivated to action, hence the website. The goal of this anonymous group has now become the further interpellation of a vast audience of web-surfers who may share similar ideologies, motivating them to actively join the cause.

The website reads like a theatric military recruitment epic, synopsising the drama in a statement reading: “On horseback, and on land, sea, and air, the United States Border Patrol defends America.” The Border patrol agent is constructed as a veritable Captain America – a hero who “never sleeps” while fulfilling the “very dangerous assignment” of safekeeping America’s violent borders.

A hero needs a villain, and according to this website, the U.S. Border Patrol faces an army of Goliaths coming at it from every angle. The site makes the claim that “[t]he illegal alien population within the United States today represents an invading force larger than *all* of the invading armies *on all sides* in *all of World War Two... Combined..[sic]*” (emphasis in original) and declares the “true” number of “illegal aliens” residing in the U.S. is “far larger than the ‘20 million’ stated by our government” (The Department of Homeland Security reports only 10.8 million). The undocumented immigrant adversaries are constructed as criminals and violent murderers, as the site informs the reader with its “Death Toll Calculator,” numbering the current count of American citizens killed “at the hands of illegal aliens...*within the borders of the United States*” (emphasis in original) at



13,776 so far this year (today's date: February 22<sup>nd</sup>). The gruesome story of Mr. Jose Ruis Roja is detailed as supporting evidence of this claim. The site spares no opportunity for dramatic effect in the account of his rape of a 12-year old "crippled" girl from Illinois.

Yet, the website tells us that the "invasion" of "illegal aliens" would not be possible without the aid of the Mexican drug cartels – the "only group capable of such a level of organization and control in Mexico." This group is constructed as the mastermind behind the entire operation to "infiltrate" the U.S. boundaries. Interestingly, the illustration of the drug cartels seamlessly becomes a lengthy account of Al Qaeda's incessant objective to "destroy America...by turning our wealth inwards on ourselves as a weapon and turning this country into a police state," and to "kill as many Americans as possible." Al Qaeda is described as a highly intelligent and resourceful franchise of tiny hate-mongering cells linked to narcotics trade in Afghanistan, Columbia, and Mexico. Suddenly, the exigency of the Border Patrol has ballooned from the invasion of "illegal aliens" to the far greater, "high priority mission: to detect and prevent the entry of terrorists and their weapons into the United States" in this age of terrorism, (usborderpatrol.com).

Perhaps the most striking feature of this rhetoric is the transformation of the problem or issue of illegal immigration to the very serious implication of a nation at war. As I explained in Chapter 1, the articulation of metaphors may serve to interpellate an audience by linking an idea to an event in order to create a new understanding and potentially, a new reality, opening up the possibility of identifying the two as one in the same. This then, allows for a number of certain behaviors, but simultaneously limits how one may respond.

On September 20, 2001 before a joint session of Congress, President George W. Bush outlined what was to be America's response to the attacks on September 11<sup>th</sup>. Here, he boldly declared, "either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists." This Manichean phrase helped to set the tone of the war on terrorism, leaving an individual required to qualify a position with little room for negotiation. For instance, at the onset of the war, much public, political and media discourse implied (if not said it outright) that one cannot support the troops while protesting the war. The metaphoric transfiguration of the issue of undocumented immigration into one of "invasion" and "terrorism," combined with grisly details of isolated crimes, has the potential to create a psychology of fear and paranoia surrounding immigration. As Ivie notes, this tactic has the ability to shape reality. Essentially, the metaphor has done the work of making the undocumented immigrants *become* the terrorists that they are described to be.

One incident that is often cited is the execution-style shooting of four American teenagers in Newark, New Jersey, leading former Tennessee senator and republican presidential candidate, Fred Thompson, to declare, "[t]welve million illegal immigrants later, we are now living in a nation that is beset by people who are suicidal maniacs and want to kill countless innocent men, women, and children around the world"(qtd. in Sampson 28). Suddenly, the American public is being asked to imagine their children as victims in these acts of violence so that legislation may be passed to fight what Newt Gingrich refers to as "the war at home" ([www.Newt.org](http://www.Newt.org)). One may argue, however, that such crimes need to be considered in context, also taking into account all of the crimes on American civilians *by* American civilians.

In 2006, *The New York Times Magazine* ran an op-ed piece that featured an upcoming study by Robert J. Sampson which found that “immigration—even if illegal—is associated with lower crime rates in most disadvantaged urban neighborhoods...that increasing immigration tracks with the broad *reduction* in crime the United States has witnessed since the 1990s” (Sampson 28). The data collected by Sampson shows a “significantly lower rate of violence among Mexican-Americans compared to blacks and whites,” and attributes such numbers to the fact that most Mexicans live in areas where the majority of residents are also Mexican (29). He cites the fact that New York is notably the most immigrant-bound city, and yet, it is ranked as one of the safest – a trend coinciding with dropping crime rates in Los Angeles and other Hispanic influenced cities (30).

In his findings, Sampson argues that immigrant populations have a tendency to revitalize a city, not only economically, but culturally, as well. While it is beyond the scope of this project, further research is needed to explore this “demon/angel” dichotomy that is being created in the representations of the immigrant population, as they appear to have little to no agency of their own. However, for the purpose of this project, Sampson argues that the penetration into America of diverse cultures may act as a “diffusion-like” process, as immigrant (particularly, but not exclusively Mexican) populations do not carry the same meanings with respect to violence and crime (33).

Interestingly, this “dilution” effect is combined with the “warfare” metaphor to create an argument that is growing in popularity among anti-immigration groups and individuals, but curiously removes the illegal immigrant from the equation. In this line of

reasoning, the crisis is not the “violent,” “gun, drug and sex trafficking” “terrorist” “aliens,” but rather *our* lack of will to stop them.

In his book, *State of Emergency: The Third World Invasion and Conquest of America*, Pat Buchanan declares “the passing of the West has begun” (1). What he refers to as “the greatest invasion in history” is the “57 million” Asians and Hispanics living in the United States today.

Between 10 percent and 20 percent of all Mexican, Central American, and Caribbean

peoples have moved into the United States. One to 2 million enter every year and stay, half of them in defiance of America’s law and disdain for America’s borders. No one knows how many illegal aliens are here. The estimates run from 12 to 20 million. (5)

Again, the Department of Homeland Security reports the illegal immigration population is on a decline from its peak at 11.1 million in 2008. Buchanan continues:

Nothing of this magnitude has ever happened in so short a span of time. There are 36 million immigrants and their children in the United States today, almost as many as came to America between Jamestown in 1608 and the Kennedy election of 1960. Nearly 90 percent of all immigrants now come from continents whose peoples have never been assimilated fully into any Western country. (5)

I provide Buchanan’s lengthy list of statistical information here because I feel it is important to mention that he does not provide a single source to account for it anywhere in his book. This suggests a number of things about his rhetoric, particularly how it is informed, and who it is created to target. One reading could interpret this oversight to

indicate that his numbers come from a source that is heavily invested in the construction of the border fence and possibly outspoken against immigration reform. It would also imply that the audience for this text is similarly positioned.

Buchanan constructs himself as a kind of omnipresence throughout the book. He supplies the reader with many historical and contemporary accounts, many (uncited) statistics, and an authority to not only assess the current environment, but has 100% confidence in his predictions for the future as well. He argues that America is being transformed against the will of the “majority” of Americans (again, no source citation). He references a few symptoms of “dying cultures,” which include the “collapse of the culture” and “paralysis of the will,” but the two sure signs of a civilization on the brink of death are “declining population and foreign invasions no longer resisted” (5). If America fails to resolve this “crisis,” Buchanan is convinced that the civilization will perish (7).

In chapter 2 of his book, aptly titled, “The Invasion,” Buchanan makes the claim that the southern border is being “overrun by illegal aliens” while they “repopulate” the north, because our leaders are too afraid of being referred to as “racist” or “xenophobic” (7-8). He gives the impression that Americans are generally apathetic toward the entire matter, and may even be going out of our way to be too accommodating to the immigrant population, simply giving them money and housing (13). “But millions,” he continues, “bring no allegiance to America and remain loyal to the lands of their birth. And though they occupy more and more rooms in our home, they are not part of our family. Nor do they wish to be” (13). The use of the Nation-as-family metaphor is particularly poignant as it implies a very distinct impression of how Buchanan views America and the American culture. “Family” suggests a notion of bloodlines, and the fact that he appears

to be resistant to the incorporation of immigrants into that string, could imply that he sees the mingling and intertwining of cultures as creating something that is unrecognizably American and therefore threatening. He reminds us: “This is not *West Side Story*” (22).

Buchanan appears to be making the argument that this “dilution” is the coordinated plot by the terrorists to orchestrate the failure and death of America. The immigrants enter through the porous border – or into the open arms of then President G.W. Bush – and slowly, but pointedly – destroy us from within by dissolving American culture (246). Finally, Buchanan ends on a dramatic note, stating that if we do not alter the crisis, our children will witness “the death of the West,” asserting that “[i]n our hearts, we know what must be done. The invasion must be stopped. But do our leaders have the vision and the will do it?” (270).

Author Samuel P. Huntington carries the same argument, but with, perhaps, less hostile rhetoric. Throughout his book, he appears to be making the claim that the identity of a culture is at stake when inundated with diversity. Such is the case with America being overwhelmed by Mexico (204) especially considering purported Mexican’s resistance to assimilation (203). Those who argue for immigrant rights and positive international relations with regards to immigration – he refers to these people as “American multiculturalists”:

reject their country’s cultural heritage. Instead of attempting to identify the United States with another civilization, however, they wish to create a country of many civilizations, which is to say a country not belonging to any civilization and lacking a cultural core. (306)

Essentially, Huntington argues, a “multiculturalized United States will not be the United States; it will be the United Nations” (306).

An interesting method in Huntington’s rhetoric is that he constructs himself as someone who is certainly well informed and he warns readers of impending doom to their culture, however, he remains very far removed from his topic. Huntington seems to go out of his way to avoid attributing any racist or controversial ideas to himself, as he reserves a considerably large portion of his text for quotations to support his vaguer and tamer arguments. Most, if not all, of the more xenophobic ideas are reported using a tactic I refer to as, “third-party rhetoric,” or the ability to convey controversial notions without accepting any authorship. Phrases such as, “one observer reported that” and “in an interview, one subject said” are responsible for any potentially contentious concepts.

Nevertheless, Huntington and Buchanan argue for the building, fortification and enforcement of the wall. Returning, then, to the physical presence of such a structure, I feel obligated to continually point out that the construction of the fence in order to convey a message of America’s sovereignty and strength rather ironically communicates an illustration quite to the contrary. The material consequences of this rhetoric have produced an edifice that does not suggest an identity of power, but instead an ideology motivated by fear.

During the construction of the wall along the southern border, 36 laws have been broken, including those that pertain to clean air and water, protection of land and animals and private property rights. “In setting aside such legal statutes, these two acts situate the U.S. walling project as a response to a ‘state of emergency,’ bidding to protect a vulnerable nation under siege...” (Brown 36). In a sense, the physical wall has helped to

create a mentality of urgency, as the authors I have already discussed go into detail to explain. They tell us that the country is not safe from its neighbors to the south, particularly those who wish to cross the border and prosper (through whatever means) in “our” north. And, as I have explained through these texts, not only are the immigrants constructed as a verifiable enemy, but *we* are to blame, as well.

On May 27, 2006, Alan Keyes gave a speech at the groundbreaking ceremony of the Minuteman border fence in Palominas, Arizona. Keyes is a conservative political activist, author, former American diplomat, and a consistent Republican presidential candidate. He is an outspoken opponent of gay marriage, abortion rights, women in combat, hate crime legislation, affirmative action, gun control and education, environmental and immigration reform. He is also a loud proponent for smaller government, capital punishment, and the Mexico border fence, among other issues ([www.ontheissues.org/alan\\_keyes.htm](http://www.ontheissues.org/alan_keyes.htm)). In his speech, he constructs himself and his fellow supporters of the fence project as true Americans who are fighting for the spirit and character of a country and its people, while simultaneously constructing immigrants and the opposition to the project as a verifiable enemy (Keyes “Speech at the Minuteman”). Interestingly, he turns and recognizes the wall he is commemorating, identifying the border fence as a symbol of America’s character and sovereignty, with the objective of unifying those who “belong” in their “oneness” ( Keyes, “Speech at the Minuteman”).

While he is speaking to the audience of the Minuteman organization and supporters of the border fence, one reading of this speech would suggest that he has another *implied* audience (Black 111). This reading would imply that he is also



interpellating the representatives of the American public – Congress and the President. He speaks of the Constitutional obligations of the federal government, and its sworn oath to protect the people of the United States, saying, “it is to *us* that they owe their allegiance,” and that it is not the government’s duty “to respond to the needs and wishes of all those folks throughout the world who wish that they were in America” (Keyes “Speech at the Minuteman”). He cites the immigration problem as a dooming crisis of a country that has lost its will to defend its borders, identity and way of life.

The ceremony was held by the Minutemen Civil Defense Corps, an organization founded on the principles of the “original Minutemen of our colonial Revolution” who claim to act on “the philosophy of America’s Founding – including respect for the God-given natural rights to life, liberty and property” (minutemanhq.com). In her assessment of the Minutemen organization’s website, Michelle Holling notes that, “[f]our years after September 11, 2001, the MMP came on the scene by appealing to the ‘average Joe,’ who could ostensibly demonstrate his commitment, dedication, and love for country by joining the group” (98-99). The entitlements they speak of appear to pertain only to those who “rightfully” reside on the northern side of the boundary, who claim to live in fear of the threat of the others who do not belong, and they swear to protect their privilege. By recreating the threat as likened to the tragedies of historic attacks on the US, the Minutemen have tapped into some of the most profound fears of a number of Americans – the mortal dangers to their safety and their “way of life.”

The Minutemen website states that they have made it their mission to continue building and rebuilding the fence in order to “show our government what it means to TRULY secure the border against events such as Pearl Harbor and 9/11...and say

'NEVER AGAIN!'" (minutemanhq.com). Holling points to a slogan on the Minutemen website stating: "Americans Doing the Jobs Our Government Won't Do!" She refers to this as a particular "framing," saying that the group is "[a]dapting the frame from what has become an adage (i.e. 'immigrants do the jobs Americans won't do') [which] already 'resonates' with the public at large, thereby requiring minimal, if any, interpretation by the MMP" (101). This is a clear illustration of appropriation, as the group is taking an established message or text and turning it to work against itself. The group has appropriated the popular theme of "immigrants do the jobs American's won't do" and has used it as an antagonistic stab at the U.S. government for its failures to competently protect the country's borders.

Again, this is a prominent example of the ways in which undocumented immigrants are being blurred and rhetorically articulated to terrorism, constructing them as enemies in the large-scale war on terrorism, as Holling notes that "the MMP emphasizes undocumented immigrants who violate the 'rule of law' in contrast to MMP members who act within or on the side of the law..." (103-104). The Minuteman group is notorious for taking matters into its own hands by "securing" or governing the border; however, its fame comes not from its fence posts, but its members' use of rhetoric and guns.

The Minuteman organization's website, [www.minutemanhq.com](http://www.minutemanhq.com), constructs the group as civilians who have identified a threat and have risen to the awesome charge of defending their country. Holling refers to the organization's use of the image of Paul Revere in their icon, saying:

The parallels between the MMP and the revolutionary Minutemen go beyond obvious analogies: Paul Revere rides through Massachusetts warning of a British Invasion....he is the ultimate patriot who, out of immense love for country, supports and defends it. Then, there are the MMP minutemen...dutifully keeping watch over the border between Arizona and Mexico, altering the Border Patrol of any signs of a possible "illegal alien" invasion. (102)

I would argue that the use of Paul Revere's image, here, is a rather fitting example of articulation as a strategy of interpellation. As the Minutemen organization links itself to the original Minutemen, and most notably, Paul Revere, it is ostensibly crafting the identities and ideologies of the group and its members. The "true" Americans, filled with and motivated by the American spirit and patriotic duty to protect the nation and people.

The wall may be their objective, but it is not their only method of defense. They interpellate the audience into a discourse surrounding not only the necessity of the walls, but their "duty" to enforce the border and their proprietary rights, and to take action where the government has failed them. The government, then, has become the true enemy in its lack of motion and material and financial will. "The righteousness with which the MMP describes its members and its organization operating gains force from its grievance against Congress, which supposedly places the safety of its citizenry in harm's way and thereby enables the MMP to promote a 'sense of efficacy' in actions it encourages among its adherents" (104-105.). By uniting the people in their common interests of their safety and sameness, this group finds the endorsement it needs as it calls the audience to action, asking it to join forces with the Minutemen, to donate money to build the fence, to protect the fence, even going as far as recruiting borderline landowners.

The Minutemen are also featured at a Pro-SB 1070 rally detailed in the *Sonoran Chronicle*. Here, a rally was held next to the border fence, attended by a number of conservative political figures and an audience of hundreds (Prendergast). Each speech blamed the government for not protecting the American citizens, and called for a need for the people to come together and fight illegal immigration. As a group of onlookers from the Mexican side of the fence gathered to watch, one political candidate running for US congress rose and said, “the fence will keep these people over there!” The audience turned to face the group, chanting, “USA! USA! USA!” (Prendergast). It would seem clear that the Minuteman’s rhetoric has been successful, as the audience in this case was (and has continually been) interpellated as a unified group of “us Americans,” victimized by “those” people on the other side of the fence, and by the government of “broken promises.” Those interpellated are, then, called to action with their wallets and votes.

### **Arguments against the Border Fence**

The arguments in support of the fence and against immigration appear to have a well-defined space for its discourse, with websites, books, and speech events. Those against the fence have carved out a very different arena, taking their side of the dialogue to the internet, as well as the news media. The people and organizations in support of the border fence regularly cite “our” rights as Americans, or Americans’ “God-given natural rights to life, liberty and property” (minutemanhq.com). Interestingly, some opposing the fence utilize this same argument. For instance, in an article written by Jeanne Meserve of *CNN*, the plight of Eloisa Tamez is told in another David vs. Goliath drama. Here, Tamez

owns three acres of land along the border, and the Department of Homeland Security is aiming to appropriate her land for its fence.

In this story, Tamez is constructed as a brave victim facing off with the bully government that wants to not only take what is hers, but destroy her heritage in the process. It is written that “she isn’t scared anymore, just determined,” as she boldly announces that she will fight as long as she has to (Meserve). The government, represented by the then Secretary of Homeland Security, Michael Chertoff, is constructed as a strong-arming thug, as he is quoted as saying, “Can we simply abandon an enterprise because it is a problem for a particular individual?...I don't think I can accept that.” Meserve predicts that Chertoff will suggest that it is the landowner’s “civic responsibility to give up land” that has been Tamez’s history and heritage “before the United States even existed.”

Meserve and *CNN* are not alone in construing Chertoff as a tyrant. *The Washington Times* reports that “Mr. Chertoff has said he waived environmental restrictions to ensure that the project would proceed “without unnecessary delays caused by administrative processes or potential litigation” (“Texas Cities”) The article is centered on a lawsuit against Chertoff by “[e]ight border cities and 10 counties,” who are charging “that Homeland Security was required by law ‘to minimize the impact on the environment, culture, commerce and quality of life for the communities and residents located near the sites at which such fencing is to be constructed.’” The article quotes the Mayor of Eagle Pass, Texas and coalition president, Chad Foster, as saying that “Secretary Chertoff should not only explain himself, he should do the right thing...” and reports that “[a]ccording to the coalition, top Homeland Security officials were wrong

when they said they consulted with local governments, and they have treated Texas communities with indifference or deceit” (“Texas Cities”). This article could be read to suggest that Secretary Chertoff does not concern himself with the argument, and will complete his mission, despite the costs.

The costs are not insignificant, either, as many arguments against the border fence are centered on the cost and general ineffectiveness of the construction. Meserve’s *CNN* article quotes Mayor Richard Cortez of the border town, McAllen, Texas, calling the fence, “‘a multi-billion dollar speedbump’ which will slow, but not stop illegal immigration” (Meserve). In their call for donations, the Minuteman website ballpark the cost of the fence at “\$250 per foot of fence,” (minutemanhq.com), and while that estimate is less than others, it still comes to \$924 million dollars for the completion of the 700 miles of fence that the Bush Administration promised. At this price, it would cost nearly \$3 billion to construct a fence for the entire 2,000 miles of border. However, many news sources, such as Fox News, report the cost to be somewhere between \$8 billion-\$30 billion

While many complain about taxpayer dollars being spent on the fence, they also argue against its effectiveness. In a brief story reported by the *Associated Press*, statistics are cited that found that

no amount of border security will stop illegal immigration; the reality is that roughly half the estimated 12 million undocumented foreigners in the United States entered on bona fide visas and stayed after they expired. (“New Wall”)

Janet Napolitano (former Governor of Arizona) told the *Associated Press*, “[y]ou show me a 50-foot wall, and I’ll show you a 51-ladder at the border. That’s the way the border

works” (Worldnetdaily.com). Politicians like Napolitano are constructed as a wise voice of reason, as Worldnetdaily.com reports that she “is smashing the idea of a border wall, stating it would be too expensive, take too long to construct, and be ineffective once completed.” *Vanity Fair* claims that Senator and former presidential candidate John McCain is a “Prisoner of Conscience,” while he touts the conservative line, he “added, unable to help himself, ‘By the way, I think the fence is least effective. But I’ll build the goddamned fence if they want it’” (Purdum).

When asked about the fence playing politically, McCain is also noted for saying, “if you alienate the Hispanics, you’ll pay a heavy price” (Purdum). This “alienation” is another problem addressed by opponents of the fence. *MSNBC* reported in 2006 on the Vatican’s official condemnation of the border fence. Here, Cardinal Renato Martin, a senior Vatican cardinal constructs himself as an international moral authority, and refers to the construction of the border fence as “an inhuman project.” President Bush is then implied to be dealing in “inhuman” affairs, as the immigrants are not construed as “criminal” or “terrorists,” but rather as “[t]housands of poor Mexicans [who] risk their lives each year sneaking across the 2,000-mile border to seek jobs.” The message from the Pope is even going so far as to suggest that the immigrants are victims, as he called for more protection for women immigrants who end up as victims of human trafficking and forced prostitution (“Vatican Cardinal”) This is quite a different approach to the construction of undocumented immigrants as terrorists. It implies that they not only possess humanity, but are in need of it, as well. The villain/victim dichotomy in this conversation with the proponents for the border fence displays the stark contrast in how the undocumented immigrant is created rhetorically while remaining relatively voiceless.

Catholic Online is a website claiming to be the largest Catholic presence on the Internet, providing educational material, spiritual and lifestyle guides, and a credible news source for Catholics around the world. The site appears to perform like an online newspaper with headlines, feature stories, editorials, and focus on a wide range of issues – all from the Catholic perspective. While this group does not presume to be in a position of moral authority, it certainly reports from its perspective and voices the popular views of the Church. However, the group voices a more pragmatic technique to the matter, calling for “comprehensive immigration reform,” and speaking of “legal avenues” for those who cross the border. The story appears to be selling a logical approach, suggesting that the fence forces immigrants to take more dangerous routes, leading to more unnecessary deaths and an increase in smuggling-related violence. The one appeal to the human element of the migrant issue – the “human rights abuses” and “lack of respect” for human dignity by enforcement authorities – is rather removed rhetorically, and then justified, again, pragmatically, as one Bishop is quoted as saying,

As Americans, we care about how our country is viewed internationally... We feel that many other Americans care as well. A border fence might be viewed in this hemisphere and overseas as a sign of fear, weakness, and isolation, not strength and engagement. It would also undercut our moral authority to request other nations to accept war refugees, for example, or other vulnerable populations.

([www.catholic.org](http://www.catholic.org))

What is interesting in the comparison between the office of the Pope and Catholic Online is the rhetorical tactics each employs. Typically, activist supporters take the more excitable angle while the leader or figurehead of an organization utilizes more reasoned



rhetoric. Here, however, the Pope pleads with humane sentiment while Catholic Online provides something resembling a geometric proof. The website appears to be interpellating a number of audiences – Catholic supporters who view the website, U.S. senators who are voting on legislation, and, perhaps, supporters of the fence. I list this last audience because of the logical appeals in the rhetoric, as it could be read that Catholic Online is attempting to debunk the myths used in the arguments for the fence while simultaneously aiming to persuade through logic. There is a considerable amount of pathos appeal in this argument, as well, as the audiences are constructed as concerned about the moral and humanitarian implications of the wall, but also as reasonable and thoughtful beings who are motivated by rationality. If this article were to be separated from the website, a reader may not even assume it to be from a Catholic perspective, but rather a secular news source that simply references Catholic figures.

The Pope and his senior Cardinal promote a message of amnesty, urging political leaders to find a way to integrate immigrants into their new societies, which is a compelling statement, considering the “warfare” rhetoric discussed in the previous section. One side of the argument is suggesting that the President is not treating this matter like a war – so they will. The stark difference between approaching the immigration issue as a criminal affair and a war campaign is that speaking in terms of criminality allows for the possibility of amnesty and solution. The terms of warfare simply do not allow for such a resolution, as the only possibilities of success are through violent means, which result in the outnumbering of one over another, or in other terms, “defeat.” In this case, the audience is interpellated as those who need to be protected, while simultaneously being called with the duty to protect. As I mentioned earlier,

metaphors have the ability to enable certain behaviors while simultaneously limiting certain responses. The notion of immigration as an invasion of terrorists that puts the nation into a position of defense is particularly impactful as it creates a mentality of a country that is not only at war, but dealing with guerrilla warfare. Nicholas Howe explains that the warfare metaphor is widely used by political figures “with the expectation that they will be understood and appreciated by the public,” as the metaphor “creates or identifies a common ground of experience and beliefs shared by speaker and audience” (89). This recalls historic encounters with enemies on America’s home front and helps to create a narrative that acts to unite an interpellated audience into a community. In constitutive rhetoric, the creation of a common history through narrative then provides the ground to motivate the audience to action. In this case, the implication of warfare could be significant and dangerous.

An interesting note in the arguments against the wall is that this discourse appears to be resistant to even addressing the “warfare” rhetoric. Opponents of the wall seem to go out of their way to communicate the issue as one of “amnesty,” often emphasizing the term. The group The People for the American Way is one such example. It was founded in 1981 by former congressmen/women, business, civic, religious and civil rights leaders who were “disturbed by the divisive rhetoric of newly politicized televangelists,” ([www.pfaw.org](http://www.pfaw.org)). The website declares a mission to defend “the American Way,” promoting equality and freedoms, and the group believes a “society that reflects these constitutional principles and progressive values is worth fighting for.” This is almost identical to the rhetoric of the Minuteman organization, yet the groups construct their ideals in very different ways. Clearly, the Minutemen and the PFAW see “the American

Way,” as similar in theory, but strikingly distinct in practice. While the Minuteman organization holds to conservative values of sovereignty and what it refers to as “tradition,” the PFAW encourages others to enter into the public, political life to promote these “progressive” ideals, to elect “progressive” candidates, and to “hold public officials accountable.”

This is, perhaps, the motivation for the “Rogues Gallery,” which is a detailed collection of Republican candidates and members of the United States Senate. In this selection, each of the candidates is pictured in black and white with a nameplate simulating a mugshot. Their history with a variety of issues – mainly social issues – is reported, and they are each provided with a stance on immigration reform, or “immigration as ‘amnesty,’” as is it written. The candidates are constructed as corrupt criminals (as their pictures would suggest) who must be stopped, citing their consistent support for Arizona’s “draconian” immigration laws.

The website approaches immigration reform as a necessity, citing the need to “honor our values and history as a nation of immigrants,” as they attack the positions of the opposition, declaring them as “a campaign grounded in fear, stereotypes, and a divisive nativism that is unworthy of America's ideals.” While the People for the American Way lack a language of “war,” its choice rhetoric is certainly not devoid of hostility. The regular use of phrases such as “surpassing ugliness,” “scapegoating,” “exploitation,” and “tragic” are juxtaposed with the construction of the “fair-minded Americans” who are called to challenge what the site refers to as the “Arsonists-in-Waiting,” who employ racial fears and general indecency ([www.pfaw.org](http://www.pfaw.org)).

In the group’s section titled, “Right-Wing Playbook on Immigration Reform,” it

provides little substance from its own position, and rather supplies a rather extensive list of verbal and legislative offenses from the conservatives in support of the border fence. To use my own metaphoric license, the group is recreating the ninth level of Hell with its hand-picked selection of “hate mongering” “racists.” In a discussion of the 2006-2007 debate on immigration reform that the PFAW refers to as being, “marked by appalling anti-immigrant rhetoric and was accompanied by a rise in anti-Latino hate crimes tracked by the FBI,” the group constructs its opponents with a number of sound bytes that refer to the immigrants as “brown” “terrorists” intent on “raping” the American society and sovereignty. I should make a short note, here that the rape metaphor is particularly intriguing as it calls to mind the traditional white male fear of men of color being sexually involved with white women, which raises a number of interesting questions about a very particular fear concerning immigration. Ultimately, the website calls on elected officials and other public figures to have the courage to “stand up to those who will use the occasion to exploit difficult economic realities, fan ethnic and racial divisions, and lie about the impact of immigrants on American life.”

To use Althusser’s concept of interpellation, the audience is being identified in a way very different to those in pro-wall group. As I explained in chapter 1, the process of interpellation does not create an identity, but rather calls attention to one that already exists, but may not be recognized. On both instances, the audience is being interpellated to be concerned citizens. However, the PFAW’s concern is for *others* while the pro-wall groups are concerned for *themselves*. The arguments for the fence are centered on the sovereignty of the nation, the defense against an immigrant invasion and the protection of their ideal way of life. The PFAW, on the other hand, focuses on human rights, amnesty

and freedom. They support legal reforms as opposed to fence construction and war rhetoric. While the pro-wall groups are anxious about cultural diffusion, the anti-wall groups construe them as racist. The audiences for each group are then interpellated as subscribing to *one* of these singular and polarized ideologies, with no room for a middle-ground.

The human rights of the immigrants are not the only issue in the arguments against the fence, as animals and environmental policies have come into play as well. While the environmentalist groups tend to utilize more image events, which will be discussed in depth in chapter 3, a brief mention of their discourse is necessary. A *Newsweek* article surrounding “Green groups” reaction to Secretary Chertoff’s acceleration of the fence construction provides a broad example of the discourse. Here, a number of environmentalist organizations are constructed as concerned protectors of natural land and wildlife, while Chertoff is implied to be an apathetic authoritarian.

The groups are concerned that “laws protecting wildlife, land, rivers, streams ... (were) just a bother to the Bush administration,” and “rushing the fence to keep out illegal aliens might spell environmental disaster, even “the destruction of the borderlands region,” while Chertoff is “uncompromising” (“Parry and Thrust”).

The Defenders of Wildlife – a group cited in this article – is an environmentalist organization that works “to protect and restore America’s native wildlife, safeguard habitat, resolve conflicts, work across international borders and educate and mobilize the public” (defenders.org). While it is active in a number of animal and habitat issues, the group has taken on the construction of the wall as a violent and unnecessary destruction of vital land. The website supplies a lengthy list of press releases surrounding the wall,

and regularly refer to specific species that are endangered by the border fence. Clearly, the group's concern is not for the human or cultural impacts of immigration; however, it does consistently refer to the ineffectiveness and failed policy of the border fence. Its aim appears to be the education of the public on the plight of the animals and natural habitat affected by the construction. The audience, then, is constructed to be, perhaps, more likened to environmentalists who do not see human suffering as the only suffering that counts – who are simply unaware of the problems created by the fence, and who are apt to be persuaded once provided with crucial information.

The Arizona Sierra Club has also begun a campaign titled, “Wild vs. Wall,” that is concerned with the environmental effects of the construction and the presence of the fence. In a 20-minute video, and a DVD, footage of the construction is highlighted, juxtaposed with images of dirty lakes, destroyed forests and ecosystems. The videos construct the border patrol as uncaring and dangerous as they are shown “blazing along on off-road vehicles,” ([www.arizonasierraclub.org](http://www.arizonasierraclub.org)), along side of images of animals, trapped hopelessly by the fence that impedes their migration.

### **Absent Argument**

The dialogue I have discussed surrounding the U.S./Mexico border fence is substantial, voiced in a wide variety of arenas and is hotly debated, so it is somewhat ironic that there appears to be a general lack of argument surrounding the U.S.'s northern border with Canada. While the matter is not entirely untouched, the material pales in comparison to the girth of discourses on the southern border. Additionally, conversation about the U.S./Canada border wall seems to be non-existent. Raymie E. McKerrow

explains that this is significant, as “in the formation of a text, out of fragments of what is said, the resulting ‘picture’ needs to be checked against ‘what is absent’ as well as what is present” (107). That is to say that the absence of an argument about the northern border is every bit as important as the very present arguments about the border in the south.

This is intriguing considering the collection of arguments I have detailed about the southern border fence. What is the implication, then, that the concerns about illegal immigration, violence, smuggling, “diffusion,” and human rights, etc., apparently do not apply to the immigrants on the other side of the northern border? The US Border Patrol website that I mentioned earlier – which is *not* associated with the actual government agency – states that the 4,000 mile border with Canada is the “longest undefended border in the world,” claiming that Canadian citizens can cross the border at will, and “visa requirements are very lenient for our ‘harmless’ brothers and sisters to the north” ([usborderpatrol.com](http://usborderpatrol.com)). While the group does not seem to be convinced that the Canadian immigrants and vacationers who enter the U.S. with ease are innocuous, it appears to be outside the scope of concern for this group. It is also rather curious that the site refers to Canadians as “brothers and sisters,” while the southern immigrants are referred to in far more degrading and savage terms. The racial connotations, here, are glaring. Taking on another “family” metaphor, this insinuates that (white) Canadians are of no threat to the American bloodlines, as they are already members of “the family.” This suggests, then, that “the family” is innately, and incontrovertibly white. Perhaps this is why this group displays little, if any, anxiety over the Canadian immigrants who appear to come and go as they please.

The US Border Patrol website does show concern, however minimal, for the

growing number of Al-Qaida terrorist cells in Detroit, citing the Muslim population in the city at 150,000. Again, the racial component to this argument is significant, as there appears to be the assumption that Muslims are racial others, when Muslim is a member of the religion of Islam, not a race or ethnicity. They are described as immigrants who simply “walked across the border through the woods near Detroit,” and yet, not once does this group call for the construction of a wall to keep them out. The problem, rather, appears to be that the 1,000 border patrol agents on the northern border are simply ill-equipped to guard the expanse of land, and, “[w]hat makes it all even worse is that even U.S. Border Patrol Agents need to sleep so less than a third of the 1,000 are on duty at any one moment,” (usborderpatrol.com).

The mention of the Canadian boundary in this website is considerably minimal compared to the focus given to the southern border. With only two pages devoted to the northern border, the site provides 15 pages to the overview of the southern issue, alone, which does not include the treatment for each specific area along the border, with a large number of pages devoted to: Tijuana, The Border at Night, West California, East California, West Arizona, Mid Arizona, East Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas, (usborderpatrol.com). Considering that the U.S./Canada border is twice as long, barely protected, and with Canadians coming and going as they please, one must wonder: Where are the concerns over violence and smuggling? Why is there not any anxiety over the “diffusion” of our culture and immigrants from the north? Why is the wall separating the U.S. from the north virtually non-existent, and why is no one arguing for more construction? The discourses surrounding the wall along the northern border with Canada are simply absent.



As I mentioned earlier, rhetoric is constrained by the material, but it also has the ability to adjust those conditions. Condit Railsback explains “rhetoric responds to material conditions and attempts to adjust the language net (attempts to express ‘truths’), because it must meld material conditions and the structure of the language network” (361). So to put it another way, the physical border is an objective reality, which affects our rhetoric. Alternatively, our rhetoric concerning the border has resulted in the erecting of a very physical wall to mark that boundary. The question comes to mind: Could the lack of discourse, or rhetoric, then affect the objective reality in a similar fashion?

It could be argued that yes, it can. If the considerable stream of discourses surrounding the southern border has produced a wall in our objective reality, then it must be true that the lack of discourse, which suggests a consensus, has produced an absent wall in the north. But what, exactly, is the consensus that has been reached which results in the lack of a wall? Future research *needs* to explore this question; however, I will venture to offer my own suggestion: the “whiteness” of some of the Canadian immigrants grants them the invisibility of the white American, thereby providing them with the cover that does not presume them as a threat that necessitates concern or anxiety. To put it bluntly, the southern immigrants *look* different, or are marked by race, and are therefore considered to *be* different, and then construed as a dangerous menace, which requires a wall to keep them out.

This examination of the discourses surrounding the walls that mark the U.S. boundaries has found that a wide variety of mediated arenas are utilized to get a message out to the public. The internet appears to be the most efficient domain for the discussion for the continuous issue. However, it is interesting to note the difference of space utilized

by both sides of the argument – one side taking to the public with speeches and the publication of books, while the other is resourceful with the news media. The arguments in favor of the construction of a wall along the southern border provide a colorful array of problematic metaphors and information, while the arguments against use similar reasoning, but in support of quite different conclusions. The concept of power in this matter is also what I would consider to be rather surprising, between those who assert themselves to be an authority but are not, and those who are an authority but do not present themselves as such.

Chapter 3 will look at these discourses in another way – through image events, and the particular use of articulation and appropriation as strategies of interpellation. I will provide a detailed analysis of the ways in which bodies are used to make arguments. This will be alongside an examination of the manufacturing of “pseudo” or “staged” events, like the Pro-SB 1070 rally I explored as discourse in this chapter. Additionally, I will look at the use of images – particularly banners along the wall – that are used to make an argument without bodies.

## **Chapter 3: Image Events**

On June 12, 1987, President Ronald Reagan stood at the Brandenburg Gate and challenged Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev to open it. The significance of his choice to speak at the gate splitting Berlin was symbolic of the heightened tensions between the Western world and the Soviet-controlled East. He was calling for an end to the Cold War. For Reagan, the wall was a symbolic manifestation of the already decades long Cold War, and as a sign of the dissolution of tyranny, oppression, fear, and distrust, the wall had to fall. Reagan's rhetoric suggested opposition to the totalitarian world for stifling the most human impulses to find happiness, to create and worship freely, "[a]nd freedom itself is transforming the globe," As he spoke of the historic hatred between worlds, Reagan claimed that fear and mistrust will end us all, and the solution was clear: "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!"

East and West, separated by the wall, created two distinct identities: Eastern Berliners and Western Berliners. Families and friends torn apart by concrete and wire, prevented from being one together, had become two-apart. On speaking about boundary walls, Susan Miller states that "[t]he terms 'Wall' and 'Fence' mistakenly evoke an image of the vertical displacement of mere air. These terms fail to convey the permanent displacement at ground level of enormous expanses of land, property and people" ("Width Matters"). Reagan made the connection between the Berlin Wall and fate of all the nations together, as the wall raises questions about freedom for all humankind, and as he called for its destruction he suggested hope, "...even in the shadow of this wall, a message of triumph." Walls carry with them the implication of a space that is held by no one, but of consequence to everyone. They mark a line that divides land and properties into independent places, separating people, cultures and ideologies.

This chapter will detail the manner in which the space of the U.S./Mexico border, particularly the fence lining the boundary, has become a place pregnant with the understandings and ideologies of a variety of groups in the argument for and against the construction of the border fence. This is done through the rhetorical acts of appropriation and articulation, which I would argue have a constitutive possibility, creating identities through images and events that may claim a space as belonging to a culturally bound group, and raising the consciousness of those who are not only affected by the tension, but are also capable of enacting significant change. Interestingly, when competing groups vie for the authority over a contested space, that space has a tendency to become the site of conflict and protest, with new groups entering the debate to challenge powers and encourage advocacy.

### **Utilizing the Fence**

Today, banners line the Arizona border donning Robert Frost's famous line, "good fences make good neighbors." Champions of the border control use this adage to suggest a point to be proven, essentially, "you stay on your side, I'll stay on mine, and we'll get along just fine." Taken out of context, this line seems perfectly fitting for their cause. The banners construct those proponents as "good neighbors" who are simply interested in maintaining their investments in a friendly and companionable manner. It suggests that they harbor no ill-will toward Mexico, so long as they adhere to the notion of neighborly borders. This is quite contrary to the discourse that erupts from these groups and it is worth mentioning that the fence is not a simple structure that implies anything having to do with good manners, which contradicts the entire message.

It is also noteworthy that Frost is famous for his uncanny deployment of irony. His poem tells a story of two men, neighbors, who meet at the wall separating their properties to make repairs. The speaker pauses a moment to reflect and ask to the necessity of the wall. "Good fences make good neighbors," is the reply.

Why do they make good neighbors? Isn't it  
Where there are cows? But here there are no cows.  
Before I built a wall I'd ask to know  
What I was walling in or walling out,  
And to whom I was like to give offense.  
Something that doesn't love a wall,  
That wants it down. (11)

He does not believe in walls for the sake of walls, and though neighbors are happy to come together to build it, as soon as the wall is complete, language departs from that of "we" to the more divorced "I" and "him." To be fair, poetry is largely interpretive, but few would argue that Frost's message is one encouraging structures of division, but, rather, he conveys a feeling of disappointment and despair. The wall he speaks of is symbolic of the irresolvable tension between hospitality and boundary, and the conflicting attitudes that separate people from one another.

Why, then, do these groups appropriate such an inappropriate message? While their intent could not possibly be discerned, it is certainly an interesting question, which leads one to two possible conclusions. I read this as a serious error in judgment that ignores the context of the line within the bulk of the poem itself. At best, it is an ignorant

mistake, comparable to the almost comical appropriation of Bruce Springsteen's "Born in the USA" in Ronald Regan's 1984 reelection campaign.

Frank J. D'Angelo suggests that such an appropriation could be a tactic of resistance, however, providing an "oppositional production and reading" (37). He explains that the appropriation of popular culture could be a form of protest through the means of complicating the message to essentially turn it against itself.

While I would argue that the use of Frost's famous line was nothing more than an oblivious miscalculation, it is an interesting notion of using the controversial fence as a campaign billboard. Individual and organized proponents of the fence are not alone in this unusual display. The fence provides a fitting space for social commentary, granting people an area to artistically make a point and allow their marginalized voices to be heard or, rather, seen.

Maribel Alvarez provides a photo essay of graffiti art along the border fence in her article, "La Pared Que Habla": "The Wall that Speaks," where she explains:

The border fence is the ultimate artifact of defiance: la migracion no cesa (migration does not relent). The wall disrupts the landscape in a profoundly unnatural way, people who live cara a cara (face-to-face) with this fence cannot help but to remark on its ugliness. But the wall's presence might as well be a taunt, a provocation of sorts, to do exactly what this imposing body of steel seeks to present. (286)

Individuals have appropriated the fence with their art as a mode of challenging the rationality behind its construction.

One such art piece is where the welcoming gate between the city of Nogales, Arizona and Nogales, Sonora, Mexico used to be, but has been replaced with an ominous, large corrugated steel wall. In giant, three-foot-tall white spray painted letters are the words “Fronteras: cicatrize en la tierra...” they take up the entire space of the wall from the ground to the barbed wire lining the top. The text displays the famous words spoken by Gringo Viejo in Carlos Fuentes’ border-treatment text, translated as, “borders are scars on the landscape.” Alvarez suggests:

The land as a kind of “body” that can be mutilated, written into, wounded, or adorned is a recurring metaphor among immigrant-rights activists in the area. As a device to engender empathy, these loose semantic associations with injury...seem to resonate with feelings experienced by many area residents. (303)

Other pieces include similar subversive phrases, such as “Me vale madre este muro esteril y feo”: “I don’t give a damn about this ugly wall” (283). These texts provide a direct challenge to the border fence, attesting to its physical presence as a hostile menace and an eyesore.

In terms of appropriation, the graffiti acts to claim the fence as the artist’s own, making it a symbol of the border culture and the hardships of oppression and abuse that are suffered by those who live on the southern side. The texts appear to be utilizing the fence for their own subversive message, which, as D’Angelo explained, is a way of turning the symbol against itself. The appropriation of the fence in this way offers an oppositional reading of the structure, one that suggests that it is not only inhumane to people and land, but also one that turns the fence’s meaning of America’s sovereignty and strength into one of hatred. This graffiti exploits the fence in its communication of



the “ugliness” of the structure and the implications behind it. These messages construct both the north and south as resentful people – the north resents the south and so builds a fence, and the south resents the north for building it.

Another interesting instance of employing the border fence as a place to be heard is in the unique advertisements of PETA, an animal rights organization known for subversive and controversial messages and billboards, that has found a space on the wall for its own campaign. The group is notably positioned against the construction of the wall, as it argues it destroys ecosystems and acts as a physical barrier for blocking and impeding the natural migration flows of a number of species. Its advertisements on the border fence, however, are not what one would expect. Instead of using the wall to campaign against it, PETA is, rather, promoting its “GO VEGAN” campaign with billboards aimed at the undocumented immigrants that may be attempting to enter the country by circumventing the fence.

The organization explains that one billboard pictures “‘fit and trim’ Mexicans in their own country, where their diet is more in line with the group’s mission. Another image on the sign [portrays] obese American children and adults ‘gorging on meaty, fat- and cholesterol-packed American food’” (Rasmussen “Speaking of PETA”). The billboard is painted with bright colors, attracting a lot of attention. It depicts two separate scenes, presumably, the north and the south sides of the border.

The bottom half, or the south, shows healthy and slim Mexicans singing and dancing in their homeland. They are smiling as they leap and twirl among tables of watermelon and vegetables. Meanwhile, the top half, or the north, depicts a very different scene. While the Mexicans dance under blue skies, the Americans simply hang in a bile-

yellow background. They significantly outnumber the few Mexicans shown in the bottom half, and they are displayed in a far more abstract style, with distorted faces and bodies, some are donned with sharp, monstrous teeth. The Americans in the picture are all “fat” and they are all holding/eating some form of processed or unhealthy food, such as hamburgers, pizza, candy and soda. An ambulance is shown next to a fallen man, who I imagine is supposed to be dead from the gluttonous eating. Even the sun looks sick.

The text of the advertisement says, “If the Border Patrol Doesn’t Get You, the Chicken and Burgers Will – Go Vegan.” The other billboard displays a large image of chicken nuggets and text stating, “BEWARE! Nuggets ahead. Return to your beans and rice.” Lindsay Rajt, assistant manager of PETA’s vegan campaign is quoted in *Bitch* magazine as saying, “We think that Mexicans and other immigrants should be warned that if they cross into the U.S. they are putting their health at risk by leaving behind a healthier, staple diet of corn tortillas, beans, rice, fruits and vegetables,” and the message “might even be frightening enough to deter people from crossing into the U.S.” (Rasmussen “Speaking of PETA”).

As a constitutive text, there are a number of possible readings. For one, the message is targeted at the undocumented immigrants as if to say, “it really is not worth the risk. You are better off where you are.” Another possibility is the message to those on the northern boundary. By campaigning on the physical structure, the advertisements appear to simultaneously lump the symbol of the constructed fence into a look at everything the group sees that is wrong with the country: the building of inhumane and oppressive structures of separation and displays of arrogance, the general gluttonous and irresponsible behaviors of Americans; and by placing the organization’s name on the

advertisement, it is automatically speaking of the mistreatment of animals and the natural habitat.

This message constitutes and constructs a number of different subjects. The undocumented immigrants attempting to cross the border despite the fence are created to be, perhaps, more intelligent and thoughtful than many in the discourses surrounding the wall give them credit for. The advertisement, written in English and Spanish, is speaking directly to them and suggesting that they should turn back if they want a healthier (on many levels) life. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, undocumented immigrants are lacking in any personal agency in the mediated discourses surrounding the matter of the border fence. Superficially, these billboards could be read as presenting the travelers with a choice/agency, however, this is somewhat problematic. Realistically, economic circumstances at home leave them with only one choice – to survive.

The campaign also focuses, though not directly, on Americans. PETA constructs itself as concerned, not about the wall in this case, but about the general health and well-being of the undocumented immigrants that seek to cross the border. It is a group that is clearly critical of a national habit and lifestyle and makes an irreverent statement behind America's back but loud enough for America to hear. PETA seeks to interpellate its members and sympathizers by calling attention to a problem it sees in the United States, and suggesting that it is a dire concern not only for those immigrants confronted with the billboards, but also those on the northern border who may agree with the sentiment. Through these billboards, PETA constructs Americans as those who should know better than to enjoy a lifestyle that ruins them. They are generally an undesirable population to live among. So undesirable, in fact, that even the desperate undocumented immigrants –

that the media has portrayed in every vile sense possible – would be better off living in the unfortunate circumstances that condemn them at home, than to live among the free and prosperous population of Americans who condemn themselves.

The use of the border fence in this campaign is particularly interesting. As I explained in chapter 1, the interpellative strategy of articulation is the linking of two elements in order to forge a new understanding of them. This connection has the ability to call attention to ideologies and creates the possibility for the construction of a particular identity. Similar to appropriation, articulation has the capacity to transform an established understanding of a symbol and attach it to language that provides an individual meaning. However, an important distinction between the two theories is necessary.

This project understands appropriation to be a subversive process, with the potential to act as a kind of power play. An established symbol is taken by contending forces and remade with a significance that purposefully challenges the original understanding, thereby exploiting it to work against itself. Articulation, on the other hand, is the use of a symbol and framing it with a unique, cultural understanding through language. It need not necessarily provoke confrontation, as it is simply an assimilation of the symbol. DeLuca goes on to explain that articulation has two attributes: speaking forth elements and linking elements (335). Essentially, the elements of an artifact exist as signifiers previous to articulation, however, they may be linked in a discourse that alters their character and creates a new understanding. In this case, the border fence has been physically constructed to be a symbol of America's strength and sovereignty (though I explained in the previous chapter that the mere presence of the wall ironically challenges that notion), however, PETA has literally attached, or linked, a new understanding to it –

one that does not portray America as a desirable place to live, but rather as one that warrants avoidance. I do not view the use of the border fence, in this case, as a challenging appropriation, because it does not appear to be offering a protest against the physical construction. However, a possible reading of this articulation could be a very stark contention to what the border fence previously meant. Perhaps, the fence is meant to *contain* the objectionable, rather than keep it out.

As Chapter 2 detailed, the notion of “keeping them out” is probably unrealistic, as I supplied a rather poignant quote from Janet Napolitano saying, “[y]ou show me a 50-foot wall, and I’ll show you a 51-foot ladder at the border.” A ladder may not be necessary, however, as Fox News reported on a video of two girls that managed to shimmy from the ground to the top of the concrete border fence in less than 18 seconds (“Video Shows Women”).

It seems relatively clear that this was the aim of those who took part in the creation of this video. The goal was to produce a “mind-bomb” that exploded in the consciousness of Americans – particularly those in favor of the construction of the border fence – and it aired on the most-watched news network in the country. The reading is one of defeat, a virtual slap in the face to those who argue for the necessity and effectiveness of a remarkably expensive and intrusive initiative. Based on some popular gendered sentiments (though I feel offended by the suggestion), I imagine one could argue that the use of laughing *women* to achieve this minor feat was a particularly poignant insult, as well.

I would remind the reader of Marshall McLuhan's famous phrase, "the medium is the message." This image event, or "mind bomb" has succeeded in its goal to "explode in the consciousness" of Americans, simply because it was not accomplished in vain. The event was filmed and then disseminated via the media, which, as DeLuca noted, has the potential to be a rather powerful weapon. While I would not argue that there is any method to measure the effectiveness of this video, I would suggest that it certainly made an impression. Not only was it played on Fox News, but other networks picked it up; one upload of it garnered nearly 600,000 views on YouTube, and a Google search produces thousands of pages of web articles, blogs, and video reproductions.

Another instance of utilizing the fence in promoting a message is an annual La Posada Sin Fronteras/ La Posada Without Borders rally held at Border Field State Park in San Diego. However, the aim of this event is not to humiliate the notion of the fence, but to rather rise above it with a simple show of solidarity. Here, people from both sides of the border meet at the fence to join together in a union of humanity. They congregate at a portion of the structure that has been downgraded to only chain link fence, allowing them to see and converse with one another. The event is described as "a celebration of the hospitality and welcoming of the stranger found in the original story, where Mary and Joseph search for shelter in Bethlehem" ([www.afsc.org](http://www.afsc.org)). The meeting reaffirms each side's commitment to unity, standing in solidarity with those families that have been separated by immigration laws and very physical borders. This year's theme, "'Do Not Be Afraid' ...recommits to a reoccurring concern for those who participate at the Posada Sin Fronteras, that is, of speaking out against border policies that force people into

treacherous terrains causing their death, as they attempt to enter the United States” ([www.afsc.org](http://www.afsc.org)).

The rally meets in December, just before Christmas. The congregants light candles, listen to keynote speakers from both sides of the fence, sing Christmas carols and pray together. Those attending in San Diego are subjected to Border Patrol inspection, which qualifies their commitment in a rather impactful manner. In a way, these groups are rising above the border fence, coming together to be together and celebrate the holiday and spirit that they share.

The event has an affecting constitution, as these two groups, from different backgrounds, and different spaces, who may not even know one another personally, choose not to ignore or accept the circumstances that bind them, but rather transcend the powers that separate them and find connection. They are constructed, not only as good Christians, but as neighborly, caring and concerned. They prove to the rest of the world that steel and cement cannot hinder good will and they provide a powerful image that speaks for itself. They are not so unlike as many who oppose the union would imagine.

The evening ends with this remarkable image of hands on both sides of the fence, reaching through the chain links to grasp one another. They give each other gifts, prayers, or just hold on in the ultimate display of mutual support. As Kevin DeLuca and Christine Harold explain in their article, “Behold the Corpse: Violent Images and the Case of Emmett Till,” images have the potential to act as constitutive texts (278). Those who are exposed to a picture or representation may have their own personal responses to it, but find that they are similar to the others around them. Suddenly, comparable fears, concerns, and interests find a singular symbol to unite individuals into a community. The

image may interpellate the audience, constitute subjects into a discourse, and provide them with a narrative that they can call their own. Without words, it may also motivate an action, calling those to respond as a strengthened collective whole rather than standing alone, unable to affect change as a solitary voice.

This image, and the many others like it, is most certainly constitutive in nature, as it exhibits those who have already been interpellated, but also serves to interpellate its audience into those who oppose the construction of the border fence and who champion the notion of humanity and neighborly comfort and support. One cannot argue over the power of the image of those who find a way to stand opposed to dominating powers and reach toward one another in a simple act of community.

### **Appropriating Images**

The Internet is an obvious choice space for activism as it is an open arena, easily accessible, and reaches a wide audience. The downside, however, is that the space is so expansive that it may be unknowingly overlooked, and it also grants the audience the agency to turn a blind eye and ignore the message.

Many image events, however, have a somewhat different goal. While they may not reach the mass population through the open air of the World Wide Web, they are unavoidable to those that are subjected to the message as it is placed directly in the face of the targeted audience. DeLuca aptly explains this, saying, “[a]lthough designed to flag media attention and generate publicity, image events are more than just a means of getting on television. They are crystallized philosophical fragments, mind bombs, that work to expand ‘the universe of thinkable thoughts’” (*Image Politics* 6). That is to say,



perhaps, that image events put that which has been considered disturbing – and therefore neglected – knowledge front and center, making the unthinkable all but unavoidable. For example, many pro-life groups have taken to littering lawns with rows of white crosses to exemplify the scale of aborted fetuses. By placing the image of death in prominent locations, those who are subjected to it cannot escape the mental and emotional impression forced upon them.

The Border Angels – a humanitarian non-profit organization with the mission of immigration advocacy – has appropriated the image of the white cross in their own message. In a protest against bill HR 4437, which considers undocumented immigration as an aggravated felony and extends to smugglers and anyone who provides aid to those who attempt to enter the country illegally, the group erected 4,000 white crosses along the border – one for every immigrant death since the beginning of San Diego’s Operation Gatekeeper in 1994. Enrique Morones, founder of the Border Angels, explains that the number of deaths has inflated from one to two every year, to one or two everyday (“Tam”).

In his explanation of “mind bombs,” DeLuca quotes philosopher Bill Devall, saying, direct action “is aimed at a larger audience, and the action should always be interpreted by the activists. Smart and creative communication of the message is as important as the action itself” (*Image Politics* 6). The image of 4,000 white crosses signifying the unnecessary death of thousands of people certainly cannot go unnoticed, and leaves a similar impression to those of the aborted fetuses. Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites explain that the public sphere depends on visual rhetorics to maintain not only deliberative voices, but also its constitutive nature in constituting public identity.

Because the public is a discursively organized body of strangers constituted solely by the acts of being addressed and paying attention, it can only acquire self-awareness and historical agency if individual auditors “see themselves” in the collective representations that are the materials of public culture. (36)

Therefore, the audience of the image must necessarily be identified with it in order to be interpellated into the discourse. While the pro-life groups aim to haunt passersby with the image of what *could have been*, the Border Angels are implanting the audience with the image of what actually *was*. One cannot help but realize that these crosses stand for people who have lived and died striving for a better life. They have names, histories, dreams, and families, and each cross is donned with the words “NO OLVIDADOS”: “Not forgotten.” By representing real people who once lived and perished with the hopes for a better life in the United States, those faced with the images of the white cross are being called to attention, forced to recognize the tremendous cost of life and their sense of humanity is tapped for emotional acknowledgement.

I chose to read this event as the appropriation of the cross, as opposed to the articulation of it, because I do not see this as a synchronic linkage forming a cultural understanding, but rather the subversion of the symbol. Christian mythology utilizes the cross to connote passing and victimhood, but also martyrdom. According to Christian dogma, Christ died on the cross to save humankind from its sins, and the Border Angels have appropriated that cross to imply that these immigrants have died in a similar vain. I read this image as suggesting that thousands of immigrants die every year in pursuit of something better and greater than themselves, and the Border Angels have chosen this symbol – 4,000 of them – to commemorate those fallen.

## **Appropriating the Body**

Emotional acknowledgment may come in a variety of forms. It may not necessarily result in the shape of empathy, or even sympathy. Some groups may illicit feelings of distrust, discomfort, and even anger in their attempts to bring light to a situation that is larger than themselves and those they confront. Democracia Ahora: Democracy Now, is a non-profit Hispanic grassroots advocacy organization that highlights the discriminatory nature of legislation being passed in Arizona and is being considered in a number of other states. The campaign is aptly titled, “Ask me for my papers.” They argue that the identity of Latinos in the US has been reduced to immigration papers (“Democracia Ahora”). They argue that Hispanics are subject to racial profiling under new laws that require them to produce citizenship papers. However, president of the group, Jorge Mursuli responds, saying, “You want to see a Latino’s papers? Maybe he’ll show you his law degree or a letter his daughter sent him....maybe she’ll show you her letter of promotion or library card. We want you to see our contributions, our accomplishments, our families, our valuable place in American society” (“Deomocracia Ahora”). They encourage others to produce the papers that display their contributions to the country they live in.

The group hosted a “Declaration in Solidarity” rally, which challenges the powers that demand their birth certificates. Here, hundreds of supporters littered the streets of border towns in Arizona, carrying signs and protesting the passage of laws that so simply label immigrants, undocumented or not, as racial others that require qualification. The

participants were not solely Latino, either, but from a variety of nationalities, and many, I should note, were white.

The protestors approached other citizens on the street, police officers, and marched to city centers to declare themselves as a force to be reckoned with. Every supporter was donned with a wristband stating, “Ask Me 4 My Papers!” and many carried signs and wore t-shirts stating something to the effect of, “I am an illegal immigrant. Ask me for my papers!” Had this been a rally of Latinos, the result could have been far different, but the presence of white supporters wearing t-shirts declaring themselves as undocumented immigrants manufactured a fascinating event. I explained in Chapter 1 that the skin acts as a visual metaphor, distinguishing individuals from one another. While race is clearly nothing more than a social construction, it has the historic material consequences of hate crimes and varying legislation. Pigments are linked to action, which garner responses and results.

In his article, “Unruly Arguments: The Body Rhetoric of Earth First!, Act Up, and Queer Nation,” Kevin Michael DeLuca explains that the use of bodies in argument can create not only a powerful message, but also the media attention they are looking for. He explains that, “their bodies, then, become not merely flags to attract attention for the argument but the site and substance of the argument itself” (10). These protestors have appropriated their bodies to be something that is challenging to the dominant powers that seek to control them. By labeling themselves as illegal, they have produced a new wall that must be crossed by those who are attempting to discipline the bodies that, they claim, do not belong on the northern side of the border.

By calling attention to their whiteness, these protestors not only trouble the presumed privilege that comes with it, but also forces a look into what Nakayama and Krizek explained as the how, why and where whiteness has become the center of power. I reiterate their quote: “[t]hus, the experiences and communication patterns of whites are taken as the norm from which Others are marked” (293), because as they stand in solidarity with the immigrants, labeling themselves as the “other,” these protestors are drawing glaring awareness to the fact that they – and those powers they oppose – are indisputably white. In a sense, these protestors are troubling the presumption of their whiteness as privilege and protection, and are appropriating their skin to make a valid point about race and racism. Undocumented immigrant, or not, these protestors have demanded a response that could, potentially, put themselves, and their bodies, at risk. The police and official powers that uphold the controversial law must necessarily cross the wall of varied bodies if they are to enact the prejudice and profiling that the legislation demands. Nevertheless, a scholar cannot help but turn to a critical eye and note that it is only *because* of their whiteness that these activists have the ability to protest. This is a classic case of the both/and, as the act of resistance, in and of itself, is an exercise of privilege. No matter the good intentions and poignant messages, at the end of the day, the protestors *are* white citizens who have little to fear from the dominant powers they object to.

I have mentioned a number of times throughout this project that the undocumented immigrants that have come to be such a hot topic of debate seem to be lacking in personal agency. Though they are nearly central in the arguments surrounding the border fence and a focus in the image events taking place at it, it seems that groups

and individuals are talking about them, or talking for them, but the immigrants do not appear to talk for themselves. In her article, "The Problem of Speaking for Others," Linda Alcoff states:

...in a situation where a well-meaning First World person is speaking for a person or group in the Third World, the very discursive arrangement may reinscribe the "hierarchy of civilizations" view where the United States lands squarely at the top. This effect occurs because the speaker is positioned as authoritative and empowered, as the knowledgeable subject, while the group in the Third World is reduced, merely because of the structure of the speaking practice, to an object and victim that must be championed from afar, thus disempowered. Though the speaker may be trying to materially improve the situation of some lesser-privileged group, the effects of her discourse is to reinforce racist, imperialist conceptions and perhaps also to further silence the lesser-privileged group's own ability to speak and be heard. (26)

The act of speaking for others, while perhaps well-intended, is colonialist in a sense. To do so is an exercise in mastery and privilege, resulting not only in the reinforcement of social and power hierarchies, but also causes those who one is speaking for to, perhaps, lose their voice entirely, and may either increase the oppression already inflicted upon them, or introduce new oppression by the speaker. Alcoff explains this, saying:

The problem is a social one, the options available to us are socially constructed, and the practices we engage in cannot be understood as simply the results of autonomous individual choice. Yet to simply replace the "I" with a "we" does not solve this problem because the "we" is also a product of mediating forces and, in a

certain sense, is also a fictional construct. Yet, to replace both "I" and "we" with a passive voice that erases agency results in an erasure of responsibility and accountability for one's speech... (11)

The issue of speaking for others is a complex one, however, because it is not simply so cut and dry as "you are not them, so do not do it," because the oppressed and voiceless are disenfranchised. It is possible that they quite simply are not being heard. I would remind the reader of Philip Wander's appeal that, as scholars, we have somewhat of an obligation to judge texts for their contribution to the social world – positive and negative – and to propose solutions offering the potential for positive social change. It would be unethical to avoid the controversial issues for the fear of criticism, and as privileged social beings, we are in a position to be effective. Do we not, then, have a moral obligation to attempt effectivity? Alcoff further explains the complexities of the matter, arguing that

the simple solution is not for the oppressed or less privileged to be able to speak for themselves, since their speech will not necessarily be either liberatory or reflective of their "true interests," if such exist. I...it can still be argued, as I think she herself concludes, that ignoring the subaltern's or oppressed person's speech is "to continue the imperialist project" (298). But if a privileging of the oppressed's speech cannot be made on the grounds that its content will necessarily be liberatory, it can be made on the grounds of the very act of speaking itself. Speaking constitutes a subject that challenges and subverts the opposition between the knowing agent and the object of knowledge, an opposition that is key in the reproduction of imperialist modes of discourse. The problem with speaking

for others exists in the very structure of discursive practice, no matter its content, and therefore it is this structure itself that needs alteration. (23)

Alcoff proposes that instead of speaking for, we should speak to and engage the disenfranchised in a dialogue. This is, indeed, a worthwhile proposition and in many cases, the appropriate one. Although, in the case of the border fence and the undocumented immigrants crossing it, the issue is more complicated. I have stated a number of times that these groups have not been granted their own agency to speak for themselves, and are constantly being spoken about and for. The truth of the matter is, however, that they enter the country illegally and into a life of hiding. They have rights that need to be protected, but to speak out and be heard would almost certainly expose them and the consequences of that action would be severe.

### **Lack of Events**

While reading this chapter, someone might note the curious lack of description of image events coming from the side of those in favor of the construction of the border fence. This is an interesting development, and certainly worthy of note. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, context and particular artifacts all act as mere fragments of a continuously on-going analysis. The history and current circumstances all act as pieces of the puzzle fitted together to provide an in-depth look into an issue, however, the absence of a piece is just as interesting, and relevant, as those that are present.

Why, then, is there a lack of movement from those who support the fence construction? Obviously, there is a great amount of discourse on the matter, which I have provided, but the events intended to attract attention are noticeably missing from this



equation. DeLuca explains that activists may take heart “to McLuhan’s aphorism ‘the medium is the message’ and [accept] McLuhan’s challenge not to cower in their ivory towers bemoaning change but to plunge into the cortex of electric technology in order to understand it and dictate the new environment to ‘turn ivory tower into control tower’” (*Image Politics* 4). Those who actively protest the wall and the movements around it have taken to the streets, so to say, and have created an undeniable event that requires the attention of those who are subjected to it. This may be in the form of the image of 4,000 crosses, signifying the tragic and unnecessary deaths of those who strive for a better life; they may literally be reaching out to touch those who are oppressed and conditioned by the physical structure, or they may go so far as to put their bodies in the way of dominant powers that seek to control them and their neighbors. Nevertheless, it is typically only those who strive to challenge the powers of authority and dominance that seem to be actively and forcefully making themselves be heard.

The simple truth of the matter is that the dominant powers are, in fact, the dominant powers. They hold and maintain control over the discourses and the circumstances that have led to this great debate. Image events are a means of creating a scenario where that which is unthinkable, and therefore out of mind, is forced into the light of day and into the consciousness of those who ostensibly have the *real* power – the people. The events are designed to attract media attention so as to garner broader – perhaps national – support, as well as to put an uncomfortable reality in the faces of those who have the ability to do something to change the cultural, social, and political climate.

The discourses of the dominant, however, already maintain a hold on the public opinion because it is the current popular opinion. The dominant have no need to create

events that highlight the problems they see themselves, and Americans, as facing, because they already command the common rhetoric of the discourse. Those who oppose the matter, however, are required to go above and beyond the discourse in order to gain attention for, and bring light to, what they see as a problematic growing movement. Should the dominant powers begin to lose the favor of the public, it would certainly be fascinating to see what approach they take in commanding the attention of the media and the national dominant ideology.

This chapter has focused on the variety of events that have been staged as a means of gaining attention and promoting a message that opposes the dominant discourses and ideology surrounding the construction of the border fence. These image events, no matter the nature of the occasion, have the capacity to gain not only media attention, but to force a problematic matter into the minds of their audiences, creating a scenario that expands consciousness and discourse in, what DeLuca has appropriately tagged as a “mind bomb.” These acts have a constitutive nature in their endeavors to claim the border and make it their own with meaning and understanding independent of the dominant ideology. Through articulation and the more confrontational appropriation, they have carved out a space for open debate and forced the public consciousness to consider the consequences of a material reality of division.

**Chapter 4:  
Conclusion**

Recently, a coalition of immigration and human rights groups have pressed Congress to investigate the death of a 40-year-old man from Tijuana suspected of throwing rocks at the border patrol, trying to escape arrest. The man was fatally shot by agents in this, his 18<sup>th</sup> attempt to cross the border. This is not an isolated incident, however, as groups complain that the use of deadly force is common, citing the fatal shooting of a teenager, last year, who was similarly killed for throwing rocks. In a letter to Congress, the groups criticize the actions of the border patrol, saying, “Deadly force should always be an action of last resort and only used if an imminent risk of death is present ... to shoot stone throwers is exceptionally disproportionate and inhumane” (Marosi “Human Rights”). The agents involved in these cases are most often cleared of any wrongdoing, as local and federal authorities claim that the measures taken by the shooters were justifiable.

My work has illustrated the manner in which incidents such as these fit into the contexts of immigration and the construction of the border fence. Ideologies are constructed through language which is foremost a social process. The rhetoric of the discourses surrounding the wall highlights a number of social constructions, particularly those of identity. The constitutive lens through which I have analyzed these texts has illuminated not only the process of constitution, but the strategies that serve to interpellate the speakers and their audiences into particular subjectivities.

Throughout the pages of this thesis, I have provided a number of examples pertaining to the Minuteman Civil Defense Corps. Its website is a prime example of constitutive rhetoric as the group claims to have the answer to the concerns over protecting the U.S. from foreign invasion, as lives and a way of life hang in the balance.

The group held rallies at the fence to garner support for keeping “those people over there” spurring a spirited chant in the faces of the southern onlookers. And Alan Keyes spoke on the government’s failings at the Minuteman’s momentous groundbreaking ceremony. The rhetoric of this group has been instrumental in spawning and motivating a growing discourse surrounding what is known as the “immigration problem.” As this discourse is adopted by others, ideologies solidify, become charged with fear, anger and distrust, resulting in considerable donations of money and time. The rhetoric can be influential in the constructed legal and moral status of “aliens,” the passing of a number of laws, a policy on both the national and international level, and the very physical construction of a very physical wall. My point, here, is simple: rhetoric has material consequences.

While I conclude my arguments in this final chapter, I want to draw attention to an interesting feature of this particular group’s strategy. Audiences of the website [minutemanhq.com](http://minutemanhq.com) have the opportunity to watch the border in real time via video surveillance cameras installed at various points along the constructed fence. Members have the opportunity to select a specific check point, and keep watch from home, get email and text message notifications at the moment of a breach, and are called with the responsibility to report any suspicious business they see taking place on their computer screens and smartphones. This means that anyone anywhere can be a minuteman and do their duty to protect America and their fellow Americans against the looming invasion.

I find this design particularly interesting as I consider the collected analysis and ideas I have put together in the previous pages. The opportunity to police the borders from the comfort of your couch or wherever you happen to be not only grants anyone a

(limited) view into what this side argues the border dispute is about, but also shapes that view through the lens of a night-vision-capable camera. I believe this is a rather apt metaphor for my closing statements. Through the use of this technology, citizens are constituted as involved, concerned patrollers who are responsible for the safety and well-being of their nation. The undocumented immigrants that occasionally make an appearance on the live-streaming video are then constructed as criminal animals that are stripped of any voice or rights, as the camera has caught them in the act of breaking the law – regardless of their reasons for doing so. Just one illegal crossing caught on tape, and suddenly, the Minutemen and other similar organizations have all the evidence and justification they need.

The rhetoric that is used by these organizations and similarly, those who oppose them, is clearly constitutive, as I believe I have shown in the preceding chapters. This approach has the capacity to go beyond persuasion by attaching to it the construction of a desired identity that is brimming with ideological implications. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary to evaluate texts and contexts and to investigate the implications that arise when a wall is built by organizations seeking to fortify boundaries, and, as a consequence, dominant ideologies. This is rather significant as I have illustrated what those ideologies are capable of. We have seen that discourse has the potential to shape national and foreign policy, recruit lives and finances to the construction, fortification and enforcement of a wall; to separate families and reinforce oppression, and put into question the integrity of a powerful nation.

As academics in the field of communication studies, we strive in our research toward the goal of contributing to the scholarship of understanding our social world. My

contribution, then, is in my estimation that the social strategies of articulation, appropriation, and image events are not only persuasive means of shaping social understanding, but also instrumental in constructing identities. I have shown this through the contexts of immigration and the border fence dispute, as the texts I have chosen to exemplify those contexts clearly display the constitution of subjects through these strategies.

In Chapter 1, I described the process of constitutive rhetoric as the interpellation of subjects in awakening an identity, the use of narrative to unite a cohesive group through a shared history, and finally the motivation to action. I provided an outline of the main interpellative strategies that I have found to be present in the rhetoric surrounding this debate and the manner in which they have the ability to constitute subjectivities. My analysis has shown that the uses of articulation, appropriation, and image events are not only persuasive rhetorical strategies but are also significant ways of interpellating the groups that use these strategies into certain political subjectivities. As identities are created, groups are formulated with the potential for great power and influence in their cohesiveness. I have also demonstrated that these constitutions have potentially harmful implications; however, there are moments of productive suggestion, as well. My theoretical lens is necessarily justified through the structural-material model, which explains that rhetoric is not only affected by objective reality, but also has the capacity to create very material consequences. In chapter 2 and chapter 3, I put the provided scholarship to work.

In chapter 2, I took an in-depth look into the verbal discourses surrounding the construction of the US/Mexico border fence and the strategies of interpellation that were

utilized by both sides of the argument. The major focus became the diachronic and synchronic articulations of metaphor, which I believe warrant some further discussion.

As I explained, articulation is the linking of two concepts – ideas, events, etc. – that are connected through the social process of language in order to formulate a new understanding that may contribute to the ideologies present in a culture. The metaphor is one such articulation which, as Robert Ivie explained, can shape reality through creative expression by opening up possibilities of understanding and essentially make the connection “real.” This goes a long way to elucidate the speaker’s constructed perception of reality while simultaneously attaching it to people and things in a significant way, which has the possibility of shaping what is real for the audience. However, it is crucial to note that the use of the metaphor has the potential to allow for a number of certain behaviors, while simultaneously limiting certain responses. For example, in chapter 2, I discussed President George W. Bush’s September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2001 speech to the joint session of congress. Here, he boldly stated that adherence to his policy is required to remain a member of a national identity. To stray or question his authority would outcast one to the identification of “terrorist,” leaving one little to no room to voice concerns about potentially sacrificing sons and daughters while engaging another nation in battle.

It is the metaphor of war, however, that I find most troubling. In my analysis, I illustrated how pro-wall/anti-immigration groups have articulated the “immigration problem” as an “invasion” through the use of warfare language. This articulation is incredibly problematic as the metaphor serves to rhetorically equate undocumented immigrants with terrorists. This awakens a volatile paranoia about safety and recalls



memories of tragic and horrific attacks on the US. At the same time, the articulators are constructed as being in defense of their country, willing to protect it at any cost.

The consequences of this constitution are dangerous and dire. I continually reiterate the notion that the metaphor has the capacity to enable certain behaviors, because the behaviors I am alluding to are not insignificant or innocent. Daily news reports from every major news network and publication detail stories similar to that of the example opening this chapter – stories of immigrants who are killed at the border fence every day. There are some 4,000 white crosses in Arizona to commemorate that fact.

Because immigrants have been articulated as terrorists, some in those organizations concerned for their own safety and the safety of their neighbors and country have taken up arms, either in the border patrol, the Minuteman militia, or by their own accord. The surveillance cameras I mentioned at the onset of this chapter are not simply entertainment, but live access generating instant responses. These nationalists justify their use of guns, arguing that they have been called to protect America and the American way, and the travelers are breaching a wall fortified by laws and policy, and they have been labeled “terrorists.” This articulation, then, has constructed not only the immigrants, but has shaped an identity of a nation at war and has granted the acceptable use of deadly force as an appropriate measure of that circumstance.

Another metaphor that I have detailed in the pages of this thesis has the same ominous potential. The concept of a “nation-as-family” that was so aptly illustrated by Pat Buchanan provides a portrayal of what America essentially *looks* like and raises many questions about the notions of bloodlines. To suggest that our country has a specific *look* to it, that is to say, it is marked by a specific race, has dangerous

consequences, especially in this era of fear and paranoia. Despite legislation, hate crimes abound, and many victims, I should remind the reader, are not living in the country illegally. Many were born within the fortified boundaries of the United States.

I counteract this approach with a speech given by President Barack Obama, standing against the recent immigration laws passed in Arizona. Throughout his speech, Obama makes calculated choices about the inclusiveness of his rhetoric. He takes a great deal of responsibility in the beginning, referring to “I” and “my administration” when speaking of troubling times, but as he moves to successes and victories, “I” is seamlessly replaced with “we.” He alternates between these approaches, occasionally choosing to separate those who dissent from the ideal whole. For instance, he introduces the issue at hand saying,

In recent days, the issue of immigration has become once more a source of fresh contention in our country, with the passage of a controversial law in Arizona and the heated reactions we’ve seen across America. Some have rallied behind this new policy. Others have protested and launched boycotts of the state.

He brings the whole back together, then, saying, “... everywhere, people have expressed frustration with a system that seems fundamentally broken” (Obama “On Illegal Immigrants”). This technique is enormously effective, as Maurice Charland notes that to be “a people” an audience requires a narrative or collective history, that will bring them together, “characterized by a teleological movement” that they must see through to the end (144). By pointing out those that separate themselves from the ultimate goal of the United States, Obama’s message of unity is at its most powerful. Returning to his rhetoric, he makes his most poignant moment, saying, “we’ve always defined ourselves

as a nation of immigrants – a nation that welcomes those willing to embrace America’s precepts. Indeed, it is this constant flow of immigrants that helped to make America what it is.” He notes the famous immigrants who have made great impacts on the nation’s history, and suggests that the country’s success comes from these “others.”

At the height of his appeal, Obama turns to the foundations of America, bringing light to the American dream:

And then there are the countless names and the quiet acts that never made the history books but were no less consequential in building this country – the generations who braved hardship and great risk to reach our shores in search of a better life for themselves and their families; the millions of people, ancestors to most of us, who believed that there was a place where they could be, at long last, free to work and worship and live their lives in peace.

He reveres the United States for being a land of sanctuary, freedom and prosperity. Few could argue against these words with much integrity or grace.

He, too, interpellates the audience as Americans, but with a different approach. He calls for an end to hostility, and asks that we recognize that America is a nation of immigrants – those who suffer hardships to reach our shores, escaping oppression of one type or another, and who embrace the ideals of our nation in hopes to make it their own. He uses many individual examples and describes the US as a union, calling for an end to intolerance and violence.

The racial politics that are evident throughout the texts I have examined throughout this thesis project are clearly defined not only by what is said, but also similarly by what is notably absent from the discourse. In chapter 2, I detailed the matter

of the northern boundary and its lack of wall and concern. This just further demonstrates my argument about the notions of “family,” bloodlines and racism. The general lack of interest in the presumed white Canadian travelers – many of whom enter and reside in the country illegally – is evidence of the racist undertones of this entire debate about the border fence being constructed in the south.

Chapter 3 also takes a close look at racial politics, although, in those pages I do not look only at *what* is being said, but *how* it is being said through the use of protest and image events. In particular, I examine the use of articulation, appropriation, and image events as strategies of interpellation. The most prominent example of this is the appropriation of bodies by the activists and the group Democracy Now.

Protestors donning shirts declaring themselves as “others” stirs the pot of racial ideologies as they aim to challenge the notions of whiteness and the presumptions that come with it. This event raises awareness to the fact that race is nothing more than a social construction, and the pigmentation of skin acts as a metaphor serving to distinguish individuals from one another, and the material creation of laws to govern and police race are not only unjust but as I pointed out previously, has the potential for dangerous ramifications on the social level.

However, in my discussion of this matter in chapter 3, I also made a note that the act of protest is an exercise in privilege, as the activists’ whiteness that they are calling attention to is the very means of their ability to protest, at all. This raises many questions about the post-colonial thoughts on the act of speaking for others. Linda Alcoff states:

Rituals of speaking are constitutive of meaning, the meaning of the words spoken as well as the meaning of the event. This claim requires us to shift the ontology of

meaning from its location in a text or utterance to a larger space, a space that includes the text or utterance but that also includes the discursive context. And an important implication of this claim is that meaning must be understood as plural and shifting, since a single text can engender diverse meanings given diverse contexts. Not only what is emphasized, noticed, and how it is understood will be affected by the location of both speaker and hearer, but the truth-value or epistemic status will also be affected. (12-13)

The problem of speaking for others lies not in the intentions of the speaker (though, I would never presume to know what those are), but the act can be oppressive in nature, as “...certain privileged locations are discursively dangerous. In particular, the practice of privileged persons speaking for or on behalf of less privileged persons has actually resulted (in many cases) in increasing or reinforcing the oppression of the group spoken for” (7). The act, then, may actually reify the voicelessness of the disenfranchised group. However, Alcoff points out that there are occasions when, perhaps, those being spoken for cannot speak for themselves, or if they do speak, they are not heard, as with the case of the undocumented immigrants.

The fence has been appropriated by a number of groups who seek to challenge the wall and the politics/ideologies behind it. Mexican artists have tagged the structure with subversive and defiant messages to the United States that very clearly display the thoughts and feelings they have about its construction.

Groups residing on the northern side of the border have taken the fence to exhibit their own messages as well. The use of the fence by PETA, for instance, is not only subversive and contentious toward the policy of construction, but also provides a glaring

critique of Americans, suggesting that the immigrants seeking to cross the border should think twice about the country and culture they risk many dangers to join. However, as I pointed out in that portion of chapter 3, the message the group is sending is perhaps misguided as it appears to ignore the dire current circumstances faced by those who make the desperate trip.

Those circumstances cannot be ignored or invalidated, and those who risk everything to cross the border into what they believe will be their salvation from oppression and insecurity need to be considered as more than a statistic characterized by a dangerously articulated metaphor. I do not believe that the analyses I have conducted throughout these pages have argued for anything resembling an “open door” policy on immigration, but I hope that it has conveyed a sense of urgency.

In the field of critical rhetoric, scholars are called to not only examine texts and contexts, but to evaluate and judge them according to the social and political implications they may spur and affect. My goal with this project is to raise awareness of the possible consequences of the identities and ideologies that are constituted in the construction of a border fence that is aimed at securing sovereign borders and national identity. I find that the implications of this rhetoric have the potential to forge further oppression, and may allow for acceptable actions of racism and violence.

Constitutive rhetoric is an effective tool in the practices of persuasion by creating the possibilities of identity construction. In the matter of the border fence, however, I am concerned that the identities being constituted are not only discriminatory, but also unpredictable and threatening. While the United States is currently involved in a number of wars overseas, it is not under invasion by its neighbors to the south, and it is a perilous

stance to suggest that America has a viable threat in those immigrants risking everything to seek a better life across the border.

While the attacks on the US on that fateful day in September were truly horrible and certainly not to be undermined, I find it unfortunate that, as we prepare to commemorate the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fallen towers, many Americans appear to be stuck in the mindset of September 12, 2001. A nation cannot heal when stricken with fear, and that fear simply should not be managed with the use of dangerous rhetoric with dangerous consequences. What is most unfortunate is that some Americans capitalize on that fear to push an agenda that is self-serving and harmful to the land and countless lives.

Throughout my research, however, I did find one moment that was especially heartening and glimmers with encouraging potential. The La Posada Sin Fronteras/ La Posada Without Borders rally held in San Francisco every Christmas offers a new light on the debate, giving ground to my concluding proposition which I will detail in a moment. I bring this event to the forefront of my position because it is a display that is not founded in fear, but humanity. The image of people, strangers, as they meet one another at a structure that physically divides them, they reach out and touch one another to show that not even a wall can separate them. I find it hard to believe that this is an isolated event, and that surely, there must be similar meetings taking place all along the border. To counteract the constitution of fear and distrust, we should highlight the moments of solidarity and support.

It is in those moments that we are defined, and able to define ourselves. Instead of casting suspicious and hateful glances over the fence or down the barrel of a gun, we

should come together to embrace our differences *and* our sameness. Our skin does not define us, but rather it is what lies beneath and in our actions. The La Posada protest is an image event that serves to interpellate those who participate into a cohesive group founded on the notion of peace and celebration. This is quite contrary to the constitutive practices of the Minutemen and other similar people and organizations I have outlined who take on a far more divisive and hostile approach.

The memories of September 11<sup>th</sup> not only recall feelings of fear, but also pride and resilience. The La Posada event does well to articulate and therefore interpellate themselves as enjoying those sentiments. It is my opinion that the United States should work to reshape the perception of a nation with its finger on the trigger, and instead encourage the articulation of a proud and united country worthy of national and international reverence.

I do not argue against boundaries, but rather the ideologies that construct them. Therefore, it is imperative to strongly consider the walls being built, and not only why they are being constructed, but who is constructing them. It stands true that while walls are built by ideologies, so to, are peoples constructed with constituted subjectivities. Therefore, I encourage future scholarship into the manner in which these subjectivities are created, giving attention to the context and implications of these constructions. Currently, a great deal of money and lives are being sacrificed for the purpose of the walls and critical investigations are necessary to examine the possible ramifications and propose solutions to counteract the dilemmas faced by them.

The rally of La Posada is a positive step in the right direction, and it should be revered as such. To display moments of unity, I believe that the message of solidarity will



be heard and humanity can shine. The rhetoric can shift with the appropriation of new symbols and new metaphors may be articulated – shaping a brighter reality – and thereby interpellating new identities in the formulating of more generous ideologies. Condit Railsback explained the notion of truth through consensus. The “truth of the times” need not necessarily be a wall constructed out of fear, but it could, instead, be the constructed relationship of neighbors.

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