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# A Melting Pot of Voices: Public Discourse and the Latino Immigrant Experience in the United States

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A Melting Pot of Voices: Public Discourse and  
the Latino Immigrant Experience in the United States

A Melting Pot of Voices: Public Discourse and  
the Latino Immigrant Experience in the United States

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in English

by

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University of Arkansas  
Bachelor of Arts in English and Spanish, 2011

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This thesis is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

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## **Abstract**

This study examines the discourses surrounding the immigrant experience in the United States in order to reconcile first-hand accounts of Latino immigrant experiences with the discourse prevailing in broader domains such as immigration law, public forums, non-fiction essays, and the news media. In order to break down barriers that prevent productive discussions, this analysis identifies stifling language guised under what Antonio Gramsci defines common sense rather than good sense. At the same time this study aims to break down stifling language, it uses first-hand accounts from Latino immigrants to provide insight as to where the American public is not listening. By analyzing common themes, images, attitudes, and language surrounding the discussions of “legal” and “illegal” immigration while also unfolding political rhetoric that assumes reason rather than projecting it, this study hopes bring further understanding to the Latino immigrant experience in the United States.

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## **Chapter 1: A Melting Pot of Voices: Public Discourse and the Latino Immigrant Experience in the United States**

### **Introduction**

The public debates concerning whether undocumented immigrants hurt the economy or bolster it, whether they draw more from social welfare programs than they contribute to them, and whether they resist social and cultural integration into the communities by not learning English have influenced immigration regulations and consequently the living conditions of immigrants in the United States. Foreign language professor and advocate for ethical immigration reform Ian Davies observes that “whatever the political mood of the time, it seems undeniable that the US Policy, economic development, and the needs of industry create the condition in which immigration, both documented and undocumented, takes place” (380). Because the political mood surrounding the immigration debates heavily influences the living conditions for immigrants in the United States, it is important that immigrants themselves be involved in the discussion. By listening to immigrants’ accounts of their journey to the United States and examining the effects social policies and discourses of immigration have on their lives, this thesis explains why the attitudes behind disdainful statements such as “immigrants take our jobs and drive down wages”; “why don’t they just come legally to the United States?” or “why don’t they learn English?” are not only misguided but ultimately inhibit a productive discussion and consideration of the immigrant experience in the U.S. Ultimately, this thesis seeks to reconcile first-hand accounts of the immigrant experience with the discourses prevailing in a variety of texts such as legal documents, online postings, non-fiction essays, and news reports. In addition, this thesis examines Latino immigrant experiences in the United States by analyzing the

themes, images, attitudes, and language surrounding the discussions of “legal” and “illegal” immigration in regard to this ethnic group.

The reason for focusing on Latino immigrants rather than on immigrants in general or exclusively on undocumented immigrants has to do with the current discourse surrounding immigration. Latino immigrants have been cast as the implicit object of immigration policies because of their marked presence in the United States in comparison to other immigrants. And though much of the discourse examined here refers to the undocumented immigrant, the rhetorical strategy of “other-ing” that pervades many policies and political debates about immigration affect all Latino immigrants, regardless of their legal status. That is, unless Latinos have their immigration documents pinned to their clothes, so to speak, they are often suspected of being “illegal.”<sup>1</sup> While this thesis focuses on Latino immigrants, much of the discussion surrounding this group also applies to immigrants of other origins. In addition, the inclusive term Latino is used in the same way that University of California’s Anthropologist Leo Chavez uses the term in his book *The Latino Threat*, which recognizes “that Latinos actually vary greatly in terms of their historical backgrounds and success in integrating into U.S. social and economic life” (2-3).

The authorial opinions presented here are not intended to displace those of Latino immigrants. Gayatri Spivak rightly critiques the cooptation of voices, as when white men assume the role of “saving brown women from brown men” (48). Likewise, the argument presented here

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<sup>1</sup> The reason for placing the word “illegal” in quotation marks is that the use of the word conveys an idea that is as problematic as condemning Rosa Parks for illegally sitting at the front of the bus during the Civil Rights movement in the segregated South. The term “illegal” unfairly indicates that the person did something wrong and therefore should be identified as a criminal. The term is relative and changes with the law. So for now, Latino immigrants who are crossing the border are considered illegal because the law is designed to keep them out of the legal system.

is not offered as the best outcome for Latino immigrants, or even as a consensus of their views. Instead, this thesis emphasizes that many of the contributors to the prevailing discourse on immigration seek to speak for and about Latino immigrants instead of listening and speaking with them. The aim here is to evaluate the language of articles, policies, and interviews in order to provide insight as to where the American public is not listening and to break down the borders that prevent productive discussions.

**Methodology:**

This study uses James Paul Gee's analytical approach, as established in *How to do Discourse Analysis*, to examine linguistic data. Specifically, Gee's approach "sees discourse analysis as tied closely to the details of language structure (grammar) but that deals with meaning in social, cultural, and political terms, a broader approach to meaning than is common in much mainstream linguistics" (170). In addition to reviewing political magazines, newspapers, website, laws, policies, academic journals and books on Latino immigration, this thesis will review the first-hand interviews of one Mexican immigrant, one Chilean immigrant, and one first-generation descendent of Mexican immigrants.

The Mexican immigrant identified by the pseudonym Isa was born in a small town in the Mexican state of San Luis Potosí and moved to the border when she was around seven years old. She stayed on the Mexican side of the border for another seven years then moved to the United States on a tourist visa, started working, and went back and forth to Mexico. With the help of her husband she successfully got her residency papers and since then has lived in the United States for over 30 years. The highest level of education she completed was at her Mexican high school on the border when she was 15, and she currently works as a housekeeper.



The Chilean immigrant interviewee, identified as Juan in this thesis, was born in Santiago, Chile, came to the United States on a student visa in 1999 to get a Ph.D., and now works as an Associate Professor of Spanish. After being hired on a worker's visa to teach as a professor, the school helped him get his residency papers.

The last interviewee, who will go by the pseudonym George, was born in San Diego, California. His parents are from Tijuana and his father worked legally in the United States while his mother worked "illegally" under her niece's name. Because of his mom's immigration status, George spent the first few years of his life in Mexico; however, he crossed the border again with his mother when he was 4 and spent the rest of his life in the United States. George's citizenship does not in itself alter his mother's immigrant status, so she moved back to Mexico two years ago to work on her immigration papers so that she can legally return to the United States. George has a Bachelor of Arts in communication and is currently an assistant manager of a Mexican restaurant.

After sharing their general background, each interviewee responded to variations of the questions below, and their answers to them will be interspersed throughout this thesis to supplement the publically disseminated discourses also examined here.

1. What were the reasons you (or your parents) immigrated to the United States?
2. What were/are some of the difficulties in adapting to U.S. cultures as an immigrant?  
What were/are some of the easier parts to adapt to in the U.S.?
3. What has been your experience with the immigration process?
4. What opinions do you hold about current immigration laws and procedures in the United States?

5. Are you familiar with the Arizona immigration law SB 1070? What opinions do you hold about this law?
6. What opinions do you hold about the Obama administrations involvement with immigration reform?
7. Why do you think the current immigration laws are the way they are?
8. How would you respond if someone asked you, “Why don’t Latin American immigrants just come legally to the United States?”
9. What perspective do your friends and family that do not live in the United States have about the United States?
10. What advice would you give a potential Latino immigrant who was not familiar with the immigration process or American cultures?
11. What aspects of mainstream American culture do you feel are necessary to adopt to become a member of American society?
12. What are some common depictions about Latino immigrants that you see in in the news media or public forums?
13. Some common complaints people have about immigrants are that they are taking America jobs, benefitting from American tax dollars, and are not learning English. What is your reaction to this?
14. What common myths or stereotypes presented in mainstream discourse about Latino immigrants would you like to clarify or debunk?

**Literature Review:**

There are several directions one could go when analyzing American attitudes toward immigration. For example, history professor and coordinator of Latin American studies at Salem

State College, Aviva Chomsky, analyzes and debunks common misconceptions in the immigration debate in her book, *“They Take Our Jobs” and 20 Other Myths about Immigration*. Building on Chomsky’s approach, this thesis analyzes common misconceptions and themes brought up in the immigration debate. However, the main difference between her research and this thesis is that this thesis focuses on the language of the different discourses in specific contemporary texts and forums. In other words, Chomsky overtly uses an assumption about immigrants as the title to each of the chapters in her book, such as “immigrants take American jobs,” but she does not look at a specific article or forum that demonstrates how this assumption is circulated and fostered. Because analysis of specific instances of discourse allows us greater insight into the grammar of the issue, this study covers contemporary texts to identify the common assumptions surrounding the immigration debates. For example, in his essay “The Hispanic Challenge” the renown, if controversial, Harvard sociologist Samuel Huntington bases most of his argument on what Chomsky considers the myths of immigration. In his essay, he warns Americans:

The persistent inflow of Hispanic immigrants threatens to divide the United States into two peoples, two cultures, and two languages. Unlike past immigrant groups, Mexicans and other Latinos have not assimilated into the mainstream U.S. culture, forming instead their own political and linguistic enclaves—from Los Angeles to Miami—and rejecting the Anglo-Protestant values that built the American dream. (30)

Huntington’s argument is based on the fear that Hispanic immigration threatens the American identity, which he believes is centered on Anglo-Protestant values. His idea of the American dream is an important point of analysis that is explored in the first chapter of this thesis in order to understand the anti-Latino immigration discourse.

Huntington’s Latino threat narrative reappears in legal discourse most recently in regards to the Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act or the Arizona immigration

law SB 1070. The Stanford and Arizona University psychologist group led by Stephanie Fryberg examines the rhetoric in 6 newspapers for 3 weeks after the Arizona 1060 SB was passed to see the language in favor and against the bill. After going over the repetitive phrases that frame the immigrant as a threat they conclude that by focusing on immigrants as a threat, the arguments supporting the bill promote the idea that immigrants (“them”) are a threat to the American public (“us”). In these arguments, the boundaries of American identity are drawn such that immigrants are foreign “others” (i.e., as outsiders who are a threat to public safety and the economy) and thus not Americans or even potential Americans. According to anthropologist Phyllis Chock’s observations of the legislature in the 1980s, this “other-ing” rhetoric has not changed in the last 20 years regarding the Latino immigrants. During her observations in Congress, she found that Latino immigrants were dehumanized by words like “prey” and “floods of immigrants.” This exclusionary rhetoric has been circulated into the recent legal discourse not only in the Arizona immigration law SB 1070, but similar anti-immigration laws written for at least 22 states including: Arkansas, Colorado, Delaware, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Texas, and Utah (Fryberg et al. 109). To determine why so many states are following the anti-immigration rhetoric, it is important to analyze what Latino immigrants are supposedly threatening.

The first threat that Huntington brings up in the quote above and that is covered in the first chapter of this thesis is that Latino immigrants are not assimilating to the imagined homogeneous American culture. Elliot Judd, the late professor of linguistics and advocate for equitable education language policy, responds to this imagined threat claiming that

New immigrants are following exactly the same patterns as those of previous generations of newcomers to the United States [...]. There is no evidence to support the contention

that this process can be speeded up, nor that immigrants who arrived in previous generations instantly learned English and abandoned their native languages. (164)

In essence, Judd's research undermines Huntington's claim that Hispanic immigrants' linguistic background in particular stands in opposition to assimilation into American culture. Judd rightfully points out that one of the reasons that many Americans believe that Hispanic immigrants are not learning English as a result of retaining their first language is that foreign language education in the United States has not been deemed a priority. Because most of the non-immigrant population has not experienced becoming fluent in a different language, there seems to be a misconception that obtaining fluency in a second language is a quick process.

In some of the interviews considered in this study, each interviewee made a point to talk about language integration processes and the social misconception about immigrants' resistance to the English language. The fact that each interviewee made a point to discuss the assumption that immigrants are resistant to the English language shows that they are aware of the assumptions conveyed in the mainstream immigration discourse and would like to be included in the conversation. By listening to the first-hand experiences of the interviewees and other immigrants, the assumptions and misconceptions pertaining to immigrants' intentions can be clarified. The addition of immigrants voices to the immigration debate could not only lead to more tolerant attitudes towards Latino immigrants but it could also spark a needed reevaluation of the real problems with the U.S. immigration system.

Because Huntington also bases his argument on the socio-cultural differences between Anglo-Protestants and Hispanic immigrants, his argument's racial overtones are difficult to ignore and coincide with Chomsky's assertion "that race is so deeply tied to ideas about citizenship and immigration that it is central to the [immigration] discussion" (xxvi). In a similar vein as Chomsky's argument, Bill Hing, a Stanford law professor and founder of San Francisco's

Immigrant Legal Resource Center, takes a look at the history of immigration policies in *Defining America Through Immigration Policy* and concludes that “in times of stress or crisis, policy makers and those who enforce those policies express a vision of America that excludes bodies of people, based on skin color, ethnicity, or political belief” (272). While blatant socially-exclusionary immigration tactics have been used throughout American history, Hing encourages readers to recognize the errors of the past so that they are not repeated. To build on Hing’s research, recent policies such as the Arizona Senate Bill 1070 and President Obama’s current immigration proposals are further examined in Chapter four of this thesis.

In contrast to Chomsky’s and Hing’s methods for exploring the immigration discussion, English professor and renowned novelist, Peter Orner, approaches the immigration discussion through a narrative lens. In his edited book *Underground America: Narratives of Undocumented Lives*, Orner compiles interviews with undocumented workers because he believes that “we cannot begin to understand the situation facing undocumented people in this country unless we start listening to them directly” (12). As indicated earlier, the main people missing from the immigration debate are the immigrants themselves, which is why this thesis follows Orner’s use of the immigrant’s voice by including first-hand interviews from Latino immigrants and a first-generation descendent in each chapter. By synthesizing contemporary publications, immigration policies, and first-hand accounts, this study aims to reconcile what it means to be an immigrant from Latin America in a country that prides itself on being a nation of immigrants.

Based on the themes that reappear in the collected data, this thesis consists of chapters focusing on the discourse surrounding those themes: social integration and the American identity, the economic factors influencing immigration, and immigration laws and policies. The following chapter, titled “Social Integration and the American Identity,” examines a recent Coca

Cola commercial aired at the 2014 Super Bowl that sparked heated reactions from political pundits like Glen Beck and Todd Starnes. The commercial celebrating American diversity received criticism from both conservative pundits who argue against the idea of multiculturalism and complain that immigrants are not assimilating into “American culture.” To understand their arguments, the chapter evaluates what each critic believes to be true American culture and extrapolates the assumptions behind the argument that “immigrants are not assimilating into American culture.” The anti-multicultural reactions of these political pundits who are part the accessible public media discourses are then compared to similar reactions that Samuel Huntington makes in the academic discourse of his article “The Hispanic Challenge.” Each immigrant (and first-generation) interviewee then discusses the arguments about immigrants resisting the English language and American culture.

The third chapter, “Fabricating Border and Economic Security,” assesses the language in conservative and liberal political forums surrounding border security and the immigrant’s influence on the American economy. This chapter covers common ideographs<sup>2</sup> like “border security” and “economy” that are used in political discourses to stifle productive discussion in the immigration debate. After a historical review of the involvement the United States has had with many of the countries that Latino immigrants are migrating from, this chapter assesses the language used to discuss immigration. The first article that is assessed is by Republican Congressman Dana Rohrabacher, who critiques the Obama administration for proposing a security hotline for immigrant workers to use to report abusive employers. This chapter also examines the language used to describe immigrants in the border security proposal page on the

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<sup>2</sup> Rhetorician Micheal McGee explains that the term “ideograph” signifies a rhetorical word or phrase used particularly in political discourses to gain support. The phrase is often vague like “freedom” but gives the impression that it has a clear meaning.

White House website. Each of these pieces of writing was chosen because they were written in an accessible forums on the internet to inform the general American public about immigration policies and proposals. In addition, both sources coming from different political parties, share similar combative rhetoric intended to separate the immigrant population from the rest of the considered American people. By examining the ideographs that are supposed to persuade the targeted audience to think in a certain way, this aim of this chapter is to emphasize the dangers of following what Antonio Gramsci defines as “common sense.” Essentially, the prevailing rhetoric of current political discourse prevents productive discussions about the reasons Latino immigrants are coming to the United States, and until those who guide much of public political discourse are open to listening to Latino immigrants, the discussions surrounding the Latino immigration policies will continue to be biased and unjust.

The last chapter of this thesis, “The Demonizing of Immigrants in American Policies” focuses on the criminal images that are associated with Latino immigrants in policies and political discourses. Then interviewees George and Juan both talk about how the immigration policies are made to benefit certain economic practices. In sum, the demonizing language of immigrants works to benefit certain businesses that benefit from the current immigration system. Juan supports this idea by reviewing the political relations the United States has had with Central American countries. He discusses how global economics has benefitted U.S. corporations, like the United Fruit Company, at the expense of Latin American workers ultimately increasing the poverty level in the countries with these exploitive corporations. All three interviewees explain that poverty or harsh economic conditions are the main reasons that families like theirs immigrate to the United States. In this section, interviewee George describes his mother’s arduous journey as an “illegal” immigrant in the United States to provide a better life for her



children. This chapter emphasizes an equal chance for immigrants to express the reasons for immigration so that policies are influenced by a democratic view of the problem rather than a view that benefits certain economic sectors at the expense of Latino immigrant populations.

Notably, each chapter repeats some main concepts that cannot be separated into disconnected categories. For example, economic factors influence the Latino immigrant images circulated in the political proposals and policies; and the imagined “American culture” affects American immigration policies and the ability for Latino immigrants to successfully integrate themselves into the social fabric of the United States. Essentially, this study does not aim to simplify the complexities of the immigration discourse in the United States. The aim, however, is to further the understanding of the Latino immigrant experience in the United States today by analyzing the voices, heard and unheard, that are part of the discourse surrounding Latino immigrants.

## Chapter 2: Social Integration and the American Identity

During one of the great American pastimes, approximately 108.7 million viewers of the 2014 Super Bowl watched the Coca Cola commercial that presented “America the Beautiful” being sung in seven languages by actors of different ethnicities. Coke’s attempt to celebrate American diversity stirred up a common anti-immigrant concern: immigrants are forming their own subcultures and are not assimilating into the American cultural mainstream. The non-traditional rendition of the patriotic American song got a rise out of conservative pundits like Glen Beck, who responds to Coke’s multicultural message by saying that its purpose is to politically divide people:

It’s in your face, and if you don’t like it, if you’re offended by it, you’re a racist. If you do like it, you’re for immigration. You’re for progress [...] Every leader of the European union that tried multiculturalism is now warning America and the rest of the world [that] multiculturalism doesn’t work. You have to assimilate [...] Look at all the countries with different languages; they failed. (Glen Beck Buzz Feed Andrew Kazinsky)

Beck conflates race, immigrants, and multiculturalism in this comment. Because the actors in the video are not Caucasian, Beck assumes that they are immigrants of different cultures. He also creates a false dichotomy regarding American culture by implying that America has one tidy cultural identity, and that the various cultural and racial groups represented by these actors undermine it. Linguist James Paul Gee explains that people “use language to be recognized as taking on a certain identity or role” and that in each Discourse people expect others in their group “to talk and act so as to be recognized as having the ‘right’ or an ‘appropriate’ identity” (106). In Beck’s case, he wrongfully assumes that there is only one American culture. Therefore, because he identifies as an American and speaks English, he does not consider those who speak a different language as having the “right” American identity.

Moreover, though Beck doesn't go into detail about the failed multicultural countries he is referring to, Anthropologist Leo Chavez analyzes the anti-multicultural argument and points out that the French-speaking Quebec model is one of the main examples used to support reasons why having multiple cultures in one country does not work. Chavez explains that "the Quebecois independence movement among French-speaking Canadians is held up as the example of the threat posed by Spanish-speaking Mexican immigrants and their descendants, who supposedly maintain linguistic and socially separate lives from the rest of U.S. society" (26). Chavez explains that the underlying fear that gets expressed in anti-immigration views like those of Glenn Beck is that, by not assimilating, Mexicans are reconquering the lands that were taken during the Mexican-American War (26). Therefore, Beck and other anti-multiculturalists expect immigrants and Americans of different cultures to assimilate into the English-speaking mainstream in order to prevent multiple cultures from gaining power in this country, something that would disrupt the current hegemonic system.

In order to understand Beck's anti-multiculturalism argument, it is important to analyze his use of the term assimilation. In keeping with the common meaning the verb "to assimilate," cultural assimilation means to "absorb and integrate (people, ideas and culture) into a wider society or culture" (oxforddictionaries.com). What set the Coca Cola advertisement apart from the others was the use of multiple languages and the variety of the actors' ethnicities. Beck responds to the overt social diversity depicted in the ad by insisting on assimilation into the mainstream—without actually stating what that mainstream or standard of compliance is: the white, English-speaking sector of the American cultural landscape. His cry for assimilation is apparently based on the assumption that the people in the advertisement are immigrants who do not speak English, instead of American citizens who are bilingual and choose to use their

linguistic wherewithal to express their love for this country in another language. Because Beck assumes that the commercial is showcasing immigrants rather than just citizens of different ethnicities, he actually complies to the “racist” identity that he asserts is unfairly attributed to people with his views on immigration.

Adding to the distaste for the multicultural celebration in the Coca Cola commercial is Fox News pundit Todd Starnes, who tweeted, “So was Coca-Cola saying America is beautiful because new immigrants don’t learn to speak English?” and “Coca Cola is the official soft drink of illegals crossing the border. #americaisbeautiful” (Sacks). According to his tweets, Starnes concludes that by celebrating multiculturalism, Coke is also celebrating undocumented immigrants crossing the border, equating tolerance for other cultures with helping immigrants illegally cross the border. More importantly, Starnes makes the assumption that because the languages in the song are not English, the singers must be illegal immigrants. He, like Glen Beck, does not consider the possibility that these actors might be legal and bilingual American citizens. These assumptions that both political pundits made prove that no matter the legal status, a person of immigrant descent is affected by the discourse of immigration as a threat. In other words, Beck and Starnes are problematically linking the phenotype and linguistic abilities of the actors in the video to a certain cultural identity and immigration status. Though the actors could be immigrants, there is no indication that this is true. More importantly, there is no indication that they illegally came to the United States as Starnes implies. He and Beck are both using the actors’ phenotypes and linguistic capabilities to base judgment on their legal status, character, and intentions for this country. Both political pundits are publically articulating ideas that have been adopted and circulated through various media and thus cemented a prevailing discourse about immigration and notions of contemporary immigrants.

Though Beck and Starnes do not specifically point out Latino immigrants as the cause of assimilation problems, Latino immigrants are consistently at the forefront of these anti-immigration attacks. For example, after 9/11, the discourse surrounding security from terrorists resulted in stricter border control efforts on the Mexican-American border. In addition to revealing his strategies to prevent further terrorist invasion from the Middle East, President Bush reminds Americans in the 2002 National Security Strategy Report that “parts of Latin America confront regional conflict, especially arising from the violence of drug cartels and their accomplices. This conflict and unrestrained narcotics trafficking could imperil the health and security of the United States” (10). Though the attack on 9/11 had nothing to do with Latino immigrants, they were still a major part of the President’s anti-terrorist discourse. Chavez reasons that “the events of 9/11 ‘raised the stakes’ and added a new and urgent argument for confronting all perceived threats to national security, both old and new” (21). Therefore, because Latino immigrants have been part of the “perceived threats to national security” the attack on 9/11 reignited old fears about Latino immigrants and their supposed resistance to assimilation. University of Wisconsin sociologist, Jennifer Correa, also makes this connection in her ethnographic study on the “reformations of state violence in everyday life on the US-Mexico border,” asserting that “[t]he War on Terror propelled the passage of the Secure Fence Act (SFA) of 2006 (approximately 700 mile barrier between the United States and Mexico), which has had profound consequences for those living along its path” (100). These reactions to Latino immigrants after 9/11 demonstrate how assumptions about immigrants threatening an imagined singular American identity can cause huge retributions against Latino immigrants.

Beck’s and Starnes’ fear of immigrants refusing to assimilate echoes the argument of Harvard sociologist Samuel Huntington, who, in his article “The Hispanic Challenge,” warns

Americans that “the persistent inflow of Hispanic immigrants threatens to divide the United States into two peoples, two cultures, and two languages” (30). Here, Huntington creates a false dichotomy by simplistically dividing the types of peoples and cultures into only two kinds, Latino immigrants and the rest of American citizens, as if the American identity only consists of one social background. As is apparent in the following quote, Huntington makes clear that the unmarked, or default, category of American culture he is referring to is the Anglo-Protestant culture. He warns that “with the contemporary flood of immigrants from Latin America” Americans will have to ponder the question: “Will the United States remain a country with a single national language and a core Anglo-Protestant culture?” (32) The warning he poses is problematic on multiple levels. The first thing to note is that he dehumanizes Latino immigrants when he talks about them in terms of a natural disaster or “flood.” He also furthers the false idea that English is the national language, when in fact the United States has no legal national language. Most importantly, he wrongfully assumes that the rest of the population is part of one culture and that it is essentially an Anglo-Protestant one—an assumption that excludes a large section of the U.S. population that does not self-identify as Protestant Christian. His article argues that Latinos are not assimilating into American culture. However, if American culture is defined by being “Anglo,” which the Merriam-Dictionary defines as “a white inhabitant of the U.S. of non-Hispanic descent,” then Huntington is essentially saying that “Hispanics” are a threat to the “white inhabitant” majority that he considers the “cultural core” of America.

Interviewee Juan further challenges Huntington’s wrongful assumptions by clarifying that:

The only way to confront misunderstanding about Latinos is to look at the misunderstanding of the American identity. The melting pot misunderstanding. There is not an American identity. It is a non-identity category. The land of immigrants shouldn’t be reduced by one identity. Those who try to identify American as one are trying to be

nationalistic; and they are chauvinistic, narrow-minded, politically interested. (personal interview)

Here, Juan refers to the “melting pot misunderstanding,” a misunderstanding based on the idea that people of different identities or cultures can melt into one identity or culture. What views like Huntington’s, and conversely Starnes’ and Beck’s fail to acknowledge is that the terms “identity” and “culture” are abstract concepts that encapsulate more than one characteristic. One person can have multiple identities depending on the different discourse communities of which he or she is a part. A person can also be part of multiple cultures and cultures are made up of peoples of different identities. Blanca Silvestrini, a professor and director of Latin American Studies at the University of Connecticut, explains that the world we live in

demands a clear definition of loyalties, with corresponding consequences for the person’s identity. Under the assumptions of the melting-pot theory people from different backgrounds have to erase these differences to enjoy full participation, because homogeneity is assumed to be the basis for political stability and economic growth. (46)

The misconception of the melting-pot American culture is that the melting-pot idea is actually celebrating diversity when it is really suppressing multiple cultures. When Juan says that “those who try to identify American as one are [...] politically interested,” he is implying that the homogeneous category of the American culture is benefiting a particular group of people at the expense of others. In Huntington’s case, he is promoting the Anglo-Protestant as the rightful American identity, while excluding all other cultures—especially those cultures that make up the “Hispanic” population—in attempts to give the Anglo-Protestant individuals more political authority.

In order to understand the intolerance for multiple cultures, one must decipher what aspects of the American identity the Latino cultures in Huntington’s article and the actors in the Coke commercial are supposedly threatening. Huntington makes clear that the “Hispanic threat”

will divide America into two languages and “peoples.” Based on Beck’s and Starnes’ reactions to the Coca Cola commercial, the ability to speak a language other than English threatens the existence of the English language. Beck concludes that “all the countries with different languages; they failed” (Kazinski) while Starnes complains that “new immigrants don’t learn to speak English” (Sacks). Though English is not officially the national language of the United States, Spanish-speaking immigrants are interpolated as the most prominent threat because Spanish is the most common second language in the United States. This fear that immigrants are going to change the most prominent language in the United States is not new. In 1751, Benjamin Franklin openly opposed German immigrants saying that “Pennsylvania will in a few years become a German colony; instead of their learning our language, we must learn theirs, or live in a foreign country” (Ong 3). Though the focused language has shifted in 263 years, the fear that invasive languages are going to change the American culture has remained the same. For this reason, over 30 states have adopted English-Only policies for the education system (Zárate and Quezada 164).

The common questions that arise in the discourse of the proponents of English-only social policies are “They knew they were going to have to speak English when they got here, so why didn’t they learn English before they came?” and “My Grandfather came to this country and learned English quickly and without any special help. Why can’t these new immigrants do the same?”—the latter being the question that linguist Elliot Judd debunks in his article “English Only and ESL Instruction: Will It Make a Difference?” (164). These two questions support the arguments behind Huntington’s, Beck’s, and Starnes’ concerns for the lack of cultural assimilation by immigrant populations. Unfortunately these questions are formed on false assumptions about the time and resources it takes to learn a second language. The first question



is based on the assumption that the education and economic systems of the original country are able to provide aspiring immigrants with sufficient language learning before they come to the United States. This assumption is particularly problematic considering the double standard English-only advocates place on foreign countries learning second languages while de-emphasizing the importance of second language education in the United States. Moreover, the first question does not take into account the global economics that have influenced the foreign country's living conditions and the lack of planning time immigrants may have if they need to provide for their family.

In regards to the difficulty of learning English in the United States, George describes his co-worker experience with learning the language after moving to the United States:

My other Assistant Manager is [my boss'] wife. She is fresh from Mexico you know? She lived her entire life in Mexico, got married to the manager, and moved to the U.S. after 24 years... He lived in the United States so she had to pack up everything and move to the U.S... She has been a trouper because she does have that language barrier you know? She studied English in Mexico, and obviously it's one thing to study it and one thing to apply it. And, I feel like she did a very good job, because she is in the food service. When you're in the food service industry, you have people asking you what's in this and what is in that; it's very fast paced. You have to think on the spot. It's tough if you don't know the language right [off] the bat... I remember one summer, when she first started working, someone asked her a simple question. They asked if that comes with a side of salsa, and she had to ask them to repeat themselves three times... Some people they get angry; they are like 'oh my god you don't know the language' they flip out... For the most part, the general population will be like 'ok there was a slight miscommunication.' [However,] some people will look at the different skin color and they are like 'oh my god they don't know the language' and they judge you. It really hurts a person's self esteem when you are trying to make that effort. To this day, she still has a little bit of fear to have a simple conversation with someone. (personal interview)

When he says that applying the language and learning it in school are two very different concepts, George addresses the first common question: "They knew they were going to have to speak English when they got here, so why didn't they learn English before they came?" His assistant manager did in fact learn English before she came to the United States, but just like

many American students do not become quickly fluent in the foreign languages they learn in high school, she was not able speak perfectly after moving to the United States. George also emphasizes the difficulty of learning a language when many people from the general public are intolerant of immigrants trying to make an effort to learn English. Not only is it difficult to learn a second language to the point where one can successfully function in a public service, but intolerant attitudes can stifle the progress of the language learner. George also addresses the racist issue of people who “look at the different skin color” and assume that the person does not speak English. George is confronting the racial stereotype held up by assumptions like Beck and Starnes’ who assume that the people of different phenotypes in the Coke commercial are immigrants who are refusing to learn English.

The second common English-only question is based on the myth that earlier generations of immigrants were able to learn English must faster than Latino immigrants. Despite these claims that support English-only policies, Judd argues that “new immigrants are following exactly the same patterns as those of previous generations of newcomers to the United States” (164). If this is true, why then do so many people believe that Latino immigrants are not refusing to learn English? Chomsky believes that on the outside it seems as though Latinos are not learning English as fast because “as one generation learns English, new Spanish speakers are arriving” and “more Latinos are speaking both languages” than was the case for past European immigrants (112). Though Latino immigrants are coming in at a higher rate than European immigrants, they are still learning English at the same rate as well as keeping the Spanish language. However, because more Latino immigrants or descendants of Latino immigrants are bilingual than past immigration groups, this does not mean they do not see the value in learning English. Contrary to the views that Latinos do not want to learn English, Judd claims that “there

is no evidence of a lack of motivation or a failure to realize the need for learning English. To claim otherwise is to perpetuate a harmful, destructive myth” (165-66)<sup>3</sup>. In fact, when asked what advice she would give to new Latino immigrants to integrate into U.S. society, interviewee Isa replied, “They have to work hard and they need to learn the language” (personal interview). Though she realizes that learning English is the most important factor that will help an immigrant function in American society, she also commented that learning the language was the most difficult aspect to adapt to when she came to the United States.

Because the United States does not emphasize the value of knowing multiple languages, as a country, most citizens do not understand the arduous journey one must go through in order to obtain fluency in a second language. For instance, while English Only politicians are critical of the length of time immigrants are taking to learn a second-language, they are also against funding resources like ESL classes or bilingual schools that would lead fluency in English faster than English-only curriculum. In fact, because English Only advocates are “notably silent on increased funding for adult ESL education, it is unlikely that there will be any marked improvement in English proficiency for those many adult immigrants who have actively demonstrated an interest in improving their English” (Judd 170). In essence, the same people who are complaining that Latino immigrant are not learning English fast enough are not supporting programs that would provide resources for these immigrants to learn English at a faster pace. Therefore, those complaining that new immigrants are not assimilating to American culture and language are also preventing these immigrants from doing so. Consequently when someone like Starnes, Huntington or Beck says that immigrants are not learning the American language, they are not promoting the opportunity for them to learn English, but rather trying to

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<sup>3</sup> Chomsky, Aviva finds the same results in a study by the Pew Hispanic Foundation (113-14).

further separate the immigrant as an outsider.

That “Latino immigrants are refusing to learn English” is an idea that has been expressed repetitively in our society, and its circulation can be explained by Antonio Gramsci’s philosophical analysis of common sense. As Gramsci explains it, “common sense is a product of history and a part of the historical process” and should not be confused with good sense (327). The idea of “common sense” can also contribute to people’s subordination by making situations of inequality and oppression appear to them as natural and unchangeable” (421). In other words, just because there is a common idea being passed around our public discourses that Latino immigrants are not learning English and are refusing to assimilate, does not mean that this is actually a true phenomenon. Rather this idea has been created and supported by the media and public discourses, which has kept the Anglo-American hegemony the same by exacerbating inequality. This is why Judd says that these rumors are “a harmful and destructive myth” (166). These myths are only feeding into the exploitation of the Latino immigrant society.

Moreover, when Huntington argues that “unlike past immigrant groups, Mexicans and other Latinos have not assimilated into the mainstream U.S. culture...rejecting the Anglo Protestant values that built the American dream,” he is arguing that there can only be one culture for the society of the U.S. to stay stable (30). One problem with saying that Latino immigrants are not assimilating like past immigrant groups is that past immigrant groups from Europe were of the white race, so eventually they were able to assimilate and become part of the dominant group of society. Latino immigrants cannot turn white in order to become part of the upper rings of society, so instead the ones who do assimilate are the ones who conform to the bottom of the social hierarchy. Aviva Chomsky explains that for people of color “assimilation has historically meant finding, learning, and accepting one’s place in the racialized order” (104-5). Therefore,

those immigrants who are resisting “assimilation” are resisting the discriminatory social hierarchy. Moreover, Huntington’s message does not consider the idea that Latino immigrants are adopting American cultural values; instead, the argument is based on physical “American identity.”

Huntington’s racial image of the white Anglo-American identity correlates with Beck’s and Starnes’ assumption that the people of color in the Coca Cola commercial were not assimilating. All three of them send out a message that assumes the American culture is a definable concept and that the normative American identity is something that does not need to be explained. This default category is reinforced by the demographic surveys that are presented after job and school applications. The most common ethnic choices in these surveys are White; Hispanic or Latino; Black or African American; Native American or American Indian; Asian/Pacific Islander; or Other. These categories are laid out with the expectation that the responders will need no explanation as to which group they belong. For example Sociologist Benjamin Bailey illustrates how many

Dominican-Americans problematize traditionally accepted United States social categories particularly for two key, interrelated reasons. First, in terms of phenotype, individual Dominicans match dominant United States criteria for inclusion in the categories ‘black’ and ‘white,’ but in terms of language and cultural heritage, they match criteria for assignment to the popularly and officially recognized category, ‘Hispanic.’ The cross-cutting ways in which Dominican-Americans fit these categories undermine the assumptions of purity and discreteness upon which the categories are constructed. (680)

Bailey identifies that these ethnic categories are created with the assumption that the applicant knows his or her place. He also identifies how the surveys problematically conflate phenotype with language and origin. Moreover, his example emphasizes that expected answer for Dominican-Americans would be “Hispanic or Latino.” However, if the applicant does not feel comfortable narrowing down his or her ethnicity uniformly into one category, he or she can then

identify as an “Other” in society. Like these problematic surveys that are constructed based on oversimplified categories, political views like Beck and Starnes’ assume that the normative American identity is based on a white phenotype and English language. Huntington would even add Protestant to the equation of the “real” American culture.

The census questionnaire is yet another document that establishes “official categories” that betray a “default” category that ultimately marks some people as “insiders” and others as “outsiders” – many times in an unrealizable and biased way. It is important that these established categories be questioned by society so that they do not continue to be treated as “common sense.” Assumed definitions of a homogeneous American culture oppress the people that do not fit the imagined description. Juan rightfully concludes that a “nation of immigrants shouldn’t be reduced by one identity” (personal interview). By listening to the immigrants who are directly involved in the discourse relating to immigration, the perpetuation of bias through the repletion of stereotypes that get treated as “common sense” can be clarified and, as a result, these immigrants can have a more equal chance to take part in American society.

### Chapter 3: Fabricating Border and Economic Security

My apple trees will never get across  
 And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.  
 He only says, 'Good fences make good neighbors'.  
 Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder  
 If I could put a notion in his head:  
 '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 offence.  
 Something there is that doesn't love a wall,  
 That wants it down.' I could say 'Elves' to him,  
 But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather  
 He said it for himself. I see him there  
 Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top  
 In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.  
 He moves in darkness as it seems to me,  
 Not of woods only and the shade of trees.  
 He will not go behind his father's saying,  
 And he likes having thought of it so well  
 He says again, "Good fences make good neighbors.

—from "Mending Wall" by Robert Frost

Robert Frost's meditation on the significance of borders is a befitting epigram to the subject of this thesis. The poem "Mending Wall" addresses the misconception of common sense coming from common assumptions rather than good sense. The poem describes an invasive fence that is installed based on irrational speculations that get encapsulated in phrases that sound as though they mean something but really have only been created by repetition. The irrationality of a fence that is built on the repetition of false assumptions rather than known truths has a counterpart in the way political pundits repeat the word "economy" to stifle the immigration debate in the United States. The repeated use of conceptually loaded terms and images has real-world consequences. Words such as the "economy" and "border security" have undoubtedly

contributed to the sanctioning and erecting of the literal fence built in 2006 that separates Mexico from the United States.

The repetitive use of the terms “economy” and “border security” in political discourse is what rhetorician Michael McGee would categorize as an ideograph. Ideographs are abstract words or phrases that are frequently used to develop support for political positions. McGee explains ideographs using the examples of “equality” and “liberty” in political discussions, which have “intrinsic force just by their utterance” (74). He explains that “like Chinese symbols they signify and ‘contain’ unique ideological commitment” (74). Therefore ideographs like “economy” and “border security” are used rhetorically in political discussions because they do not have clear definitions but give the impression of a clear meaning, which ultimately stifles an exploration of reason on the matter at hand.

For example, rather than looking at the problems causing undocumented immigrants to cross the border, the government focused on the ideograph, “border security,” and spent around 1.9 billion dollars<sup>4</sup> to install a temporary solution to the flaws in the immigration system in the United States. The metaphorical and actual fence along the U.S.-Mexico border is linked to the use of the term “the economy” that has the impression of sending a clear purpose, but instead supports much of the unfounded reasons of immigration reforms.

The repetition in the phrase “good fences make good neighbors” works the same as the phrase as “immigrants are taking American jobs” in the sense that the repetition has falsely given it meaning. Just as the speaker of the poem asks, “Why do [fences] make good neighbors?” and what was he “walling in or walling out?” the general public must analyze the sense of the

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<sup>4</sup> Rodger Hodge calculates this cost on page 62 of his article “Borderworld: How the U.S. is Reengineering Homeland Security”.



common phrase “immigrants are taking American jobs.” As such, this chapter poses and attempts to answer the following questions: How are these economic myths created and sustained? And, what political and economic conditions lead to scapegoat rhetoric?

In order to answer these questions, the intimidating aspect of the “economy” ideograph may be deconstructed by a quick review of the main economic and political factors that have led to the current globalized economy. According to prior mentioned Aviva Chomsky, “most analyses point to two major structural developments in the U.S. economy as the main causes of the shifting employment pattern in the late twentieth century: deregulation and deindustrialization” (4). The Reagan administration began this shift by deregulating major sectors of the economy and initiating “cutbacks in federal social spending” (4). Businesses no longer regulated by the government sought a higher profit margin by moving workers and production around the globe (4). Because of the laws protecting workers rights and unions in the United States, companies found it beneficial to outsource their jobs across the border to Central and South America, where the U.S. laws did not apply. Subsequently, “if workers or governments [abroad] start to demand a greater share of profits, the company can simply close down” (7). Professor of multicultural studies Sherrow Pinder adds that these corporations then find a different location where the “overall costs, including labor, corporate taxes, and workplace health and safety laws, are minimal or non existent” (229). Therefore, through trade agreements such as NAFTA and DR-CAFTA<sup>5</sup>, U.S. companies find Latin American countries that “are not part of the world system as partners in future growth, but as avenues for the exploitation of cheap labor” (Pinder 229). Though the U.S. emphasized the benefits of foreign investment and

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<sup>5</sup> Acronyms for the North American Free Trade Agreement and the Dominican Republic-Central American Free Trade Agreement, respectively.

economic development for these poorer countries through these trade agreements, the result was that they were not able to compete on the same economic level of the United States. Pinder forthrightly predicts that “as these countries’ economies decline and corruption flourishes, the situation for the poor will become increasingly precarious” (230).

In light of the economic background of these countries, the idea that “immigrants are taking American jobs and are the reason for the economic problems in the U.S.” becomes parochial. The ideographical phrase above stifles productive conversation because it sets up the Latino immigrants as the source of the economic problems in the United States and ignores the influence the United States has had on Latin American economies. This idea that “immigrants are taking American jobs” does not take into consideration the free trade agreements that help U.S. companies increase their profit margin by exploiting Latin American workers who are not able to successfully protest their conditions. What immigration patterns demonstrate in relation to economic downturns is that when these workers try to improve their living and working conditions in the United States they are not welcome and are further demonized by the prevalence of phrases such as “immigrants are taking American jobs.”

In fact, these poor economic conditions caused by the exploitation of cheap labor are the main reasons that the families of interviewees Isa and George decide to move from Mexico to the United States. Isa explains:

You can make in one week here what you make in a month in Mexico... We don't have nothing down there. I cannot have what I have here. Down there you have so much time because there are no jobs... In Mexico, no jobs. Down there it be hard... you work hard and don't get paid. (personal interview)

George adds:

My parents' reason [for coming to the United States]... definitely financially a better life for me, better way of life and living condition. It's very, very difficult to make it in Mexico. People make 40-50 dollars a week down there. (personal interview)

Isa and George present another angle to the discussion of the “economy.” The argument that immigrants are taking American jobs and hurting the American economy does not address the reason immigrants are coming to America to work, but rather focuses on what “they” are doing to “us.”

On the idea that the border should be sealed off since immigrants are driving down wages, Tim Wise, a prominent anti-racist author and activist, retorts:

[...] such an argument presumes that the only thing keeping employers from giving white workers a raise (or black workers for that matter) is the presence of easily exploited foreign labor, as if closing the border would suddenly convince them to open up their wallets and give working people a better deal (139).

Thus, Wise highlights the irrationality behind the ideographic phrase “immigrants are taking jobs and hurting the economy.” The view that the exploited worker is causing the economic problems only derails the focus from the real source of the issue. Instead of placing the blame on immigrant workers, the legally authorized workers would enhance their bargaining power by improving the rights of exploited undocumented workers in the United States and exploited workers in Central and South America. Wise concludes that American workers “would surely be better off if those coming from Mexico were made legal and organized into unions” (140). The result would be that workers would not have to compete with each other on the basis of cheapening their labor, and the undermining of competition in this regard would additionally respond to the ethical matter of global inequality rooted in disparate working standards.

If this is true and the immigrant population is not the true reason that citizens are unemployed, then how do these views continually get sustained? One of the reasons is that the immigrant scapegoating rhetoric is repeated through ideographs in the political discourse. For

example, in response to a public announcement for a hotline service<sup>6</sup> providing workers, documented and undocumented, to call if they receive unfair compensation, California's Republican Congressman Dana Rohrabacher argues: "using taxpayers dollars to reassure illegal alien workers that they too have a right to be paid 'fairly' for the illegal work they have performed is an affront to hard-working American citizens and legal immigrants who are struggling to make ends meet in these harsh economic times." Here Rohrabacher uses the ideograph "economy" to set up an "us vs. them" argument. In addition, the term "illegal alien" distances the identity of the American from the criminal stranger. In regard to using language to form another person's identity, linguist James Paul Gee explains, "people use language to build different identities for themselves in different contexts. They also build identities for other people. In turn, they often use the identities they are building for others to further the work they are doing building their own identity" (110). Therefore, scapegoating language like Rohrabacher's is used to keep the Latino immigrant from being part of the American identity.

Notably, Rohrabacher's argument places the undocumented worker in the role of scapegoat for the economic problems of most workers instead of blaming the employer who is purposely hiring cheap labor in order to make a higher profit. Not only is he scapegoating "illegal aliens," but he is also reinforcing the idea that their illegal status excuses their exploitation. Rohrabacher's implicit claims are that undocumented workers should not receive equal wages for equal work and that undocumented workers contribute to the economic plight of the American working class. In essence, his argument both supports cheap labor and condemns it. What Rohrabacher fails to acknowledge is that if the undocumented worker got paid the same

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<sup>6</sup> When I tried to find the exact hotline to which Congressman Rohrabacher was referring, I think it is important to note that typing "hotline for undocumented workers" in Google search only provided hotlines to report illegal immigrants.

wages as the sanctioned worker, employers would not be hiring the undocumented worker, and the legally authorized workers Rohrabacher claims to be fighting for would actually have less competition in the job market. His argument, presented in the guise of a pathetic appeal to common sense and anxiety, only reinforces the myth that immigrants are the reason for the economic problems instead of the employers who focus exclusively on reaping profits by resorting to lower wages and other forms of cost-savings.

Because messages like his, which foreground immigrants as the source of economic problems, are repeated regularly in the media, the phrase “immigrants are taking American jobs” becomes what the aforementioned philosopher Antonio Gramsci deems as the formation of “common sense.” Gramsci reasons that “civil society is permeated by a system of values, attitudes, morality, and other beliefs that passively or actively support the established order and thus the class interests that dominate it” (qtd. in Chavez 45). In this case, the general public appears to have passively adopted the idea that immigrants are the cause of economic instability, which is a belief that supports the present hegemony. This idea has been sustained by rhetorical ideographs from political leaders like Congressman Rohrabacher and the fixation of the physical symbol of the Mexican-American border, which is another a concept that society has passively accepted as the “norm.” Unlike the speaker in Frost’s “Mending Wall,” the American public has not actively questioned “what [we are] walling in or walling out” when it comes to our national borders. The lack of debate acknowledging the role of employers in promoting international economic inequality underscores the limited scope of issues presented to the American public. It seems fair to say that without a broader scope in the consideration of the issue, the general public is left, as Gramsci observed in another context, to deal with the matter “without having a critical awareness [...] to take part in a conception of the world mechanically imposed by the external

environment” (Gramsci 325). As a result of banal rationalization, employers who contribute to the conditions of global inequality are not directly involved in the scapegoating of the subaltern immigrant communities that are kept at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder. In Wise’s words:

Instead of focusing on the trade agreements that allow companies to move wherever they can get the best return on investment—agreements that have even by the government’s admission resulted in the loss of hundreds of thousands of well-paying jobs—white workers are encouraged by racism and white bonding to focus their ire on the workers themselves. (140)

Though Rohrabacher’s approach does not inherently focus on race, his scapegoating rhetoric is commonly associated with bigoted arguments. In other words, he scapegoats the immigrant workers who do not have legal rights to stand up to oppressive employers and presents the problem of the immigrants in an “us vs. them” argument. For example, he claims that “the first obligation and duty of a responsible government is to its citizens. If the administration truly wants to improve the plight of American workers as a whole, it must first strictly enforce our immigrations laws by ensuring all workers are legal workers.” Rohrabacher’s appeal to the American workers sets up the immigrant workers as the cause of the American workers’ economic problems. The common phrase “immigrants are taking American jobs” is the underlying argument of his statement above. An analysis of why immigrants are working without documentation in the United States is not open for discussion because he assumes that the only cause for American economic problems comes from undocumented immigrants. Rohrabacher also highlights the myth that immigrants are actively choosing not to come to the country legally, rather than focusing on the complexities of the immigration system.

On the topic of illegal crossing, Juan emphasizes that

The problem with the immigrants is the immigrants are illegal, but no more illegal [than] the companies that are recruiting them. [The companies] give really low salaries to them,

abuse them and make a lot of money out of them. So the illegality of immigration is more complex than just people coming without papers to America; it is an economical issue. (personal interview)

Again, Juan brings up the economy, but his reference to the economic problems behind immigrants coming to the United States is different from the economic problems that politicians are using in order to strengthen borders. By not identifying the economic issues on both sides of the border, politicians are advertising that “immigrants are harming the U.S. economy” in order to deemphasize the complexities about the global economy and the U.S. involvement in exploiting Latin American workers. To this end, Chomsky concludes, “Mexicans cross the border ‘illegally’ because they are not allowed to cross the border legally. The law discriminates by making it illegal for some people to do what is perfectly legal for others” (187). Chomsky thus refers to the quotas placed on certain countries that have more immigrants than others.

Adding to this discussion, George acknowledges,

A lot of the perception is that as soon as immigrants are here, they are thinking “what can I get for free.” I’m not going to lie; there could be some people like that, but [they’re] not all like that. [Immigrants are asking] what and where can I work so I can make some money and contribute to this country. The majority of the people are trying to make a decent living not only for the families they have here but for the people they have back at home. (personal interview)

George recognizes the common trope that immigrants are spending American taxes, and are hurting the American economy, but he also believes that this possibility has been blown out of proportion. He follows this by saying “If you have the money you can get the legal status...But if you’ve got no education, no money, then there is no other way unless you walk over the border...which is why so many people are doing it because they have no other option” (personal interview). George acknowledges the economic reasons people are crossing the border. Though he does not go into detail about global economics, he has seen first hand the difficulties of living in Mexico since many people in his family, including his mother who has applied for residency

in the U.S., still live under Mexico's harsh economic conditions. Unlike the phrase "immigrants are taking American jobs," George humanizes immigrants by considering their reasons for crossing the border. Money is still a major reason for immigrants coming to the United States, but George reasons that most immigrants illegally crossing the border are doing so because they have run out of other economic options in their home country, not because they are criminals.

The rationale upholding the trope that republican Congressman Rohrabacher has expressed is not only part of the republican political discourse, but can also be seen in the liberal discourse as well. For example, on the White House's website addressing immigration Obama is quoted as saying, "We strengthened security at the borders so that we could finally stem the tide of illegal immigrants. We put more boots on the ground on the southern border than at any time in our history. And today, illegal crossings are down nearly 80 percent from their peak in 2000." The combatant language Obama uses such as "strengthened security," "boots on the ground," and "tide of illegal immigrants" is language that dehumanizes the reasons people are crossing the border. The need for stronger "security" and "boots on the ground" implies that immigrants are attacking the United States rather than trying to come work here. This trope is captured in a memorable phrase such as "good fences, make good neighbors"; in this case the demonizing and dehumanizing of Mexican immigrants is efficiently accomplished by the ideographs—"boots on the ground" and the "stem[ming] of the tide of illegal immigrants." However, the truths behind these phrases are misleading. Moreover, the repetition of such phrases stifles the flow of critical thinking and problem solving because they take the place of true reasoning.

In contrast to the combatant language that Obama uses, Isa explains the journey of the immigrant from a different perspective: "They say it takes like 3 days to... to walk [across the border in Texas]. But see, the people that pay a lot, who walk for days, is [sic] the people that



really want work, good people” (personal interview). Her image of the immigrant who walks for three days to find work does not imply that they are the people who are trying to invade the United States, something suggested by the White House’s use of the phrase “tide of illegal immigrants.”

While President Obama uses military lexis when talking about the border, this is not to say that he has not tried to help certain illegal immigrants who came to the United States. At the same time he is trying to “strengthen the security at the border” his proposal aims to “stop punishing innocent young people brought to the country through no fault of their own by their parents” (whitehouse.gov). His proposal sends out an ambiguous message that young illegal immigrants should not be treated like criminals, while their parents and other adults crossing the border should. Though he seems to be trying to help the immigration system by making it easier for young immigrants to get amnesty, he is still fixated on the imaginary line that separates the United States from Mexico. The idea of protecting the border has become part of the “common sense immigration reform” rather than good sense that requires critical awareness. The reason the white house gives for building a fence to separate the Mexican side from the American side is to “strengthen security” (whitehouse.gov). The emphasis on “security” sends out the false message that the people on the other side of the border are coming to the United States to threaten the safety of its citizens, which divides the people on either side of the border, both physically and metaphorically. “Strengthening security” is another ideograph that sounds appealing, but illustrates a false sense of reality. One cannot simplify the complexities of behind the causes of migration by putting up a fence. The imaginary border is not the source of the problem; the real problem in the immigration debate lies within the reasons why immigrants are crossing the border in the first place. Aviva Chomsky concludes, “Fences and borders might be touted as a

curb on immigration, but in fact they serve to harden global inequality” (189). Chomsky highlights the idea that the fence is not addressing the global economic issues that are causing migration to the United States, and by ignoring these issues we are only putting more distance between our neighbors and ourselves. Those ignoring the reasons behind the fence’s existence are ignoring that “something there is that doesn’t love a wall” (Frost). Frost’s poem emphasizes the unnaturalness of fences, when the surrounding nature erodes the fences every year so that the speaker and his neighbor continually have to rebuild the fence. Politicians are building barriers and a war zone under the false pretense that the fence will provide protection. However, as the “Mending Wall” implies, building a fence is only going to further strain social relations with our neighbors.

Political scientist Jack Citrin and his research team, Donald Green, Christopher Muste and Cara Wong, conducted a study testing how immigration resentment becomes part of the public opinion. After surveying over 2,428 participants in 1992 and over 1,719 in 1994, the research group found that “personal economic circumstances play little role in opinion formation, but beliefs about the state of the national economy, anxiety of taxes and the generalized feelings about Hispanics and Asians, the major immigrant groups, are significant determinants of restrictionist sentiment” (858). In other words, people are more willing to listen to the political discourse surrounding immigration, rather than their own personal economic experiences to form an opinion about the correlation between immigrants and the economy. This study supports the idea that the general public often follows what Gramsci refers to as “common sense” rather than actively pursuing critical awareness to the influence the economy has on immigration. Both Citrin and Chavez’s studies show how the increased anti-immigrant sentiments appear in the news media and in political discourses in the United States after sharp

economic downturn. Citrin believes this is “partly in response to the tendency of politicians and labor union leaders to blame foreign workers for unemployment and downward pressures on wages” (859). Chavez makes a similar connection as he presents a graph that shows a correlation between the annual unemployment rates and number of magazine covers focused on immigrants per year. Shortly following a recession or a sharp economic downturn the coverage of immigration-related issues on magazine covers were higher (20). These studies emphasize the large influence that politicians using ideographs like “economy” and “border security” have on public opinion. Brown University’s Political Science and International Studies professor Peter Andreas points out the paradox of the United States having “a borderless economy and a barricaded border” (141) By not confronting this paradox, the general public is receiving a false message from the government that continues to exploit Latino immigrants.

The immigration discussion should not limit the scope of the problem to the American side of the border. The call to protect the American border without analyzing the international influence the United States has had on the countries on the other side of the border is narrow-minded and will only increase instability between the United States and neighboring countries. This paradox is created by a lack of critical thinking about the issues and a lack of democratic discussion on the issue. By passively accepting the linkage of immigrants to the American economy as “common sense,” paradoxes like the one above will continue to benefit one group of people at the expense of another. In this case, it is important to question political ideographs and when one does he or she may recognize the real meanings behind the speech, just as the speaker in Frost’s poem recognizes the irony in the phrase “Good fences make good neighbors.” Finally, by listening to immigrants who are the most affected by the discussion, one will be able to approach the issue with a wider understanding of the immigration problem and make a more

informed decision.

#### **Chapter 4: The Demonizing of Immigrants in American Immigration Policies**

In the Fall 2013 edition of *The Oxford American*, Chicana author and activist Stephanie Elizondo Griest shares her experience finding bodies of immigrant travelers in Brookes County, a county along the southern tip of Texas. In hopes that “something will change this time in Washington,” she describes the woman’s body she identified with a border patrol agent saying it looked as if the immigrant was “wearing a child-sized t-shirt, but then I see the belly has bloated to colossal proportions, so engorged it has exploded along the jean line... From the nose down, [the] skin [on her face] is black and leathered, but the top half is strangely untouched, the color of a bruised peach. There are deep holes instead of eyes” (36). Griest’s article takes a more emotional approach to appeal to Washington than most political news articles that tend to skip the immigrant narrative to go straight to the numbers and policy discussion. Though the description of the body does not tell the audience what the woman was like, why she was crossing the border, or even how long ago that the body became flesh for scavengers in the desert, the image of her arm that was “eaten to the bone with just a few pulpy morsels remaining” is an image that does not get shown in the news media. Moreover, the shocking description brings awareness to the fact that the general public can successfully avoid hearing about the deaths and the condition in which the defeated immigrant travelers are found; only those people who actively search for these descriptions or work on the border are likely to encounter the brutal consequences of immigration policies that criminalize immigrants and drive them to take so many risks while crossing the border. Though the style of the creative non-fiction Griest presents is not typical of legal policies, the gripping details of her first-hand experience is something that should not get ignored when the immigration policies are created.

After Griest focuses on the description of the body, her audience is able to better conceptualize the significance of statistics she gives. The body that she describes was one among 129 other immigrant bodies found in Brooks County in 2012 (35). Though the deaths of people crossing the southern border cannot be accurately counted because many bodies are never found, immigration policies do not acknowledge the death rate of immigrant travelers as a major issue in the immigration debate. Instead, the focus of immigration legal discourse is on how to keep immigrants from crossing the border, rather than on the reasons that the immigrants have for taking such dangerous measures to cross the border.

When asked, “why reports of this nature are not part of the public consciousness?”

Stanford law professor and founder of San Francisco’s Immigrant Legal Resource Center, Bill Ong Hing, responds:

Because the majority of policy makers and most Americans do not view the Mexican migrant as ‘one of us’ or even *potentially* one of us. American, and therefore who a *real* American is, has been defined in a manner that excludes the Mexican migrant. And this is not simply a function of the fact that these victims are undocumented or attempting surreptitious entries; if their faces and language were accepted in the conventional image of *an American*, the reaction would be far different. (2)

According to Hing, those of the American public who are exposed to images like Griest’s are impervious to them because they are not able to visualize the immigrant as part of the American identity. This lack of empathy stems from the common notions presented in the previous chapters that Latinos are threatening the American identity because they are not assimilating to the culture and are taking “American” jobs. The lack of sympathy also coalesces with the criminal connotations that are attached the “illegal” immigrants traveling to the United States. The result is that more empathetic reports like Griest’s are not common or acceptable in the political discourse—where reason and credibility are valued over emotion—and the lack of compassion from the American public and policy makers becomes the discursive norm.

For example, a 2013 *Washington Post* article on the amount of deportations that occurred under the Obama administration sticks to the discourse of using reason and statistics over human relations to appeal to the audience. Writer David Nakamura explains that while President Obama has deferred the deportation of 400,000 young immigrants who were brought illegally into the country, over 2 million undocumented immigrants have been deported during his term. Though Nakamura's tone conveys disapproval of the 2 million deportations, he does not make any pathetic appeals to his readers, which may or may not have been a successful rhetorical strategy given the numerous reader comments that revealed a perception of immigration as a matter of delinquency. These unsympathetic comments in turn foregrounded the *topos* of an agonistic or contrastive relationship (us vs. them, in this case) that underlies the common claims of the anti-immigrant argument: immigrants are coming to *our* country illegally to take American jobs; immigrants benefit from American taxes without paying *their* equal share; and immigrants rebuff English as *our* national language.

For example, Dave Gorak, a member of the Midwest Coalition to Reduce Immigration, responds to the *Washington Post* article with the claim that “[i]llegal aliens bear all responsibility for any trauma associated with their decision to knowingly break [U.S.] immigration laws. If they don't like this arrangement, they should stay home and make their own countries work for them instead of coming [to the U.S.] illegally and then having the nerve to demand respect and dignity.”

Gorak's intolerant attitude toward immigration is reflected in the legal discourse of the Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act, otherwise commonly known as the Arizona immigration law SB 1070. Sanctioned in April of 2010, this state senate bill states that under “any lawful contact made by a law enforcement official or agency of this state... where

reasonable suspicion exists that the person is an alien who is unlawfully present in the United States, a reasonable attempt shall be made, when practicable, to determine the immigration status of the person” (Art. 8 sec. B).<sup>7</sup> SB 1070 essentially requires immigrants to carry their legalization papers at all times so that when they are stopped they do not get detained. Despite the linguistic appeals to “reason”—both, in terms of “probable cause” and “measure”—in the senate bill, in June of 2012 the U.S. Department of Justice sued Arizona based on the provisions that allow “police officers to arrest people without warrants on suspicion that they’ve committed crimes” (Jeremy). The Supreme Court, however, disagreed with the Department of Justice, and its ruling on the matter was that the provisions that “require officers to check the immigration status of the people they stop” do not conflict with the constitution (Jeremy). So while officers cannot stop people simply to check their immigration status, once a person has been stopped for any other reason, officers may proceed to determine their immigration status—a decision that may be prompted by nothing other than a person’s appearance as a foreigner. In essence, this policy not only affects illegal immigrants, but it affects all Latinos and citizens of color because police are basing their reasoning on appearance.

Moreover, the very name of the Safe Neighborhoods Act reinforces the idea that officers should take extra precaution with immigrants because they threaten the safety of the community and do not deserve the same treatment as citizens who do not appear to be foreign. In essence, the implications of this legal discourse echo the intolerant attitudes of outspoken public figures like Dave Gorak.

In addition to the demonizing language that appears in the Arizona Act SB 1070, the

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<sup>7</sup> After Arizona passed this law in 2010, Alabama, Utah, North Carolina, Indiana and Georgia quickly passed their own version of this law.



white house website also uses combative language when referring to protecting the border. Under a section titled “Doubling boots on the ground” the website lauds the increased number of border control agents that have doubled from “10,00 in 2004 to more than 21,000 in 2011” reminding citizens that there has been “a 700 percent increase since 9/11” (whitehouse.gov). The “boots on the ground” language corresponds with the language of the title “Support our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act” in that it implicitly asks the audience to support one side over the other. Not only does the idea “support our troops so that we can live safe and free on the American side” seem to be the main message, but this language supports Hing’s argument that “American, and therefore who a *real* American is, has been defined in a manner that excludes the Mexican migrant” (2). The militaristic rhetoric excludes the immigrant from the conversation because it frames them as threats to American safety. In addition, the mention of 9/11 in the White House website deliberately emphasizes the connotation of terrorism in correlation with immigration. Because 9/11 sparked a “war on terror,” border security has been one of the active responses to try to stop “terrorists.”<sup>8</sup> Because “terrorism” is an abstraction that fills the semantic role reserved for an actual human enemy, politicians have turned to the border as a more concrete representation of how to protect the country. And although Mexican immigrants were not involved in the 9/11 attacks, the combative language surrounding the immigration debates imply that they are threats to the security of the United States.

The characterization of Mexican and other Latino immigrants crossing the southern border as dangerous criminals becomes even more clear when the White House website explains the rationale behind the government’s border control policy:

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<sup>8</sup> Sociologist Jennifer Correa notes that “The War on terror propelled the passage of the Security Fence Act (SFA) of 2006 (approximately 700 mile barrier between the United States and Mexico), which has had profound consequences for those living along its path.”

The President's proposal creates new criminal penalties dedicated to combating transnational criminal organizations that traffic in drugs, weapons, and money, and that smuggle people across the borders [...] Through this approach, we will bolster our efforts to deprive criminal enterprises, including those operating along the Southwest border, of their infrastructure and profits. (whitehouse.gov)

Notably, the list of illegal trafficking puts people in the same category of drugs and weapons.

The repetition of the term "criminal" indicates the reason that there must be "boots on the ground" in order to protect the country. Again, this passage distances the American from the immigrant by using combatant language that suggests that these immigrants are the enemy.

While the purpose of the site is to share the reasons behind implementing security on the border, the statement reveals no consideration of how the militarization of the border contributes to the increased sophistication of criminal organizations. Bill Ong Hing explains that these "get tough campaigns [...] provide opportunities for sophisticated immigrant smuggling rings with ties to organized crime and drug traffickers. Tough policies benefited smugglers who had the transportation and communication capabilities to counter the INS's most zealous efforts" (189).

Because walking across the border is more difficult, more undocumented immigrants who are desperate to get into the country are turning to "coyotes" who are considered the experts of crossing the border. So while border control has made it harder for immigrants to get across the border on their own, it has not stopped immigrants from coming across and has created more opportunities for "professional smugglers" who are now able to raise the stakes (in terms of money, security, dignity, and personal freedom) for the immigrants who want to get across.

More importantly, the focus on the security of the border stifles the discussion that addresses the reasons undocumented immigrants are coming across the border. In regards to the legislator's exclusive discourse with immigrants, anthropologist Phillus Chock conducted a discourse analysis on the language legislatures use to describe the immigration problems. Chock

notes that the legislative speakers “tended to reserve human subjectivities and agency for themselves” (168). This rhetorical strategy is reflected in [whitehouse.gov](http://whitehouse.gov) passage above, as the statement appeals to the safety of the reader by associating the immigration problems with the “criminal enterprises” that are coming from the Mexican side of the border. Rather than addressing the reasons behind why many immigrants who are not terrorists or violent criminals are risking their lives to cross the border, the policies above frame the discussion around the safety of the people on the American side of the border.

By using agonistic rhetoric and characterizing undocumented immigrants as in indistinguishable mass, the [whitehouse.gov](http://whitehouse.gov) website focuses on violent criminal activity to the exclusion of other legal concerns, such as the exploiting of immigrant workers by U.S. employers. The agonistic and scapegoating rhetoric shifts all the blame for hardship and clandestine activity to “illegal” workers themselves instead of acknowledging how all the factors contribute to the complexity of the immigration phenomenon. For instance, while the [whitehouse.gov](http://whitehouse.gov) website refers to undocumented immigrants and “human smugglers” as criminals, the website does not use the term “criminal” when referring to the businesses that are hiring undocumented immigrants for cheap labor. The website does observe that “businesses that knowingly employ undocumented workers are exploiting the system to gain an advantage over businesses that play by the rules” and that the “President’s proposal is designed to stop these unfair hiring practices and hold these companies accountable” ([whitehouse.gov](http://whitehouse.gov)). However, these American companies are not framed by the term “criminal organizations,” even though they are breaking the law and profiting from the undocumented workers just as much as, if not more, than the “human smugglers.” In addition, there is no mention of “criminal penalties” for scofflaw employers as there are for the “human smugglers.” The elimination of the aggressive language

and the word “criminal” when referring to the companies who are hiring undocumented workers indicates a more sympathetic view towards the American employers, even though they are also breaking the law and promoting the process of illegal immigration for their own gains. This shift in language also supports the idea that policy makers are more able to sympathize with the fraudulent American businessman and less able to sympathize with the Mexican immigrant worker.

After analyzing how the media plays into the public understanding of the immigration debate, the Stanford and Arizona University psychologist group led by Stephanie Fryberg came to a similar conclusion as Bill Hing, saying that “in these [immigration] arguments, the boundaries of American identity are drawn such that immigrants are foreign ‘others’ (i.e. as outsiders who are a threat to public safety and the economy) and thus not Americans or even potential Americans” (106). The “other-ing” discourse present in the Safe Neighborhood Act and white house website allows businesses, legislators and American citizens to feel vindicated in actions and motives against Latino immigrants.

In order to change the harsh criminal images that policymakers paint in their language, it is important to let the immigrant be part of the conversation. That being said, when asked why so many Latinos do not simply come to the United States legally, Juan, a Chilean immigrant interviewed for this thesis project, responded, “It is quite difficult to do so.” Then he exclaimed that the questions never gets asked why American companies are choosing illegal means to profit from human capital from Latin America. He emphasizes that the question of morality needs to be considered from the Latino’s perspective:

Because anytime the governments of the Latin American countries decide to stop this kind of, you know, profiting process by the corporations, these corporations somehow, with the support of the pentagon and the US army, produce a coup d’état in Latin America. And, that is the sad history of the twentieth century [in] Latin American and

American relationships. So, all the American interventions in Latin American countries in the name democracy were basically motivated by supporting corporation profits. It is not by chance that we were called Banana Republics. (personal interview)

Unlike the White House's website that emphasizes the illegality of undocumented immigrants, Juan focuses on the illegal actions of the profiting processes of corporations that have historically exploited Latino countries. Juan's reference to the term "Banana Republic" comes from U.S. corporations like the Cuyamel Fruit Company that started in Honduras. These fruit companies and other companies that produced raw material would buy large amounts of agriculture lands, leaving the native peoples landless (Chapman 8). These companies would then employ these natives as low-wage workers, and as Juan mentioned, any disturbance to the profiting system would generate drastic economic and political consequences.

The most notable examples that illustrate Juan's reference of interventions would be the coup d'état against Honduras' president Miguel Dávila in 1907. In essence, President Dávila made a decision that upset the corporate heads of the Cuyamel Fruit Company and the corporation's mercenary army assassinated Dávila and put in place another president that would abide by the corporation's needs. Another prime example of U.S. intervention supporting outsourced company profits happened during the 1950s in Guatemala. Because Guatemala's president Jacobo Árbenz Guzmán allotted fruit company lands to landless peasants, the United Fruit Company convinced presidents Truman and Eisenhower that the president was pro-Soviet so that they would help remove him from office. The CIA did in fact facilitate the 1954 Guatemalan coup d'état and replaced Guzmán with a pro-business colonel Carlos Castillo Armas who was assassinated by a guard 3 years later. This U.S. intervention led to Guatemala's political unrest for the next twenty-six years, a period generally referred to as the Guatemalan Civil War (Koeppel 65-71).

George, the U.S.-born Latino interviewed for this project, expresses similar distrust of U.S. policies stating, “Economically, we immigrants play a big role in the American economy. The way things are, politicians like it because they are making money off of it. A big reason for why the things are the way they are is that [politicians] are waiting to pass a bill that benefits them” (personal interview). Though George does not mention the American interventions in Central America, he is familiar with the profiting system that is driving the politics of the immigration debate.

And while Juan is critical of the history the United States has had with Latin America, he is less critical of the Obama administration specifically and more critical of the political and economic systems that seem to stifle the process for immigration reform. While he recognizes that the administration has supported strict border policies and numerous deportations, he believes that President Obama has a lot of pressure from congress. In addition, Juan notes how hard it is for the Obama administration to change its policy on border security since

“all of this [border security] is a business. They make a lot of money out of this. They feel so, so proud that they have the house full of immigrants and people to deport, but they keep these people in there for two three months before being deported... All of this is just because it’s a way to transfer public funds to private companies... it’s a capitalist process of accumulation...the more efficient they are at capturing people the more money for them.” (personal interview)

Instead of focusing only on the president for the millions of deportations, he explains that these immigration laws are based on profits that corporations can receive. When Juan refers to the months that the immigrants might be kept in deportation, he is referring to the public funds that the private prison systems will get if they keep the prison full. In other words, the motives behind the two million deportations are the same as those that drive corporations to outsource their workers or hire illegal workers: economic control and higher profits. Dean of Humanities and Professor of Anthropology at the University of California, Carlos Vélez-Ibáñez makes a similar

argument to Juan's when he observes that "in a capitalistic economic system, things such as labor, materials, and processes can be bought and sold for a price, and conditions are created in which some populations may be regarded primarily as the type of price-associated group to be used and discarded not unlike disposable materials or any used manufacturing goods" (Vélez-Ibáñez 7). Juan blames the corporations that look at Latino immigrants and workers as opportunities for money, rather than as people who deserve basic human rights. The idea that border security is a business that benefits from "disposable" immigrants is an idea that does not get circulated as often as the "criminal immigrant" image in the mainstream immigration discourse. In fact, the discourse criminalizing immigrants benefits the prison and security industry. By "other-ing" and dehumanizing the "illegal immigrant" the safety of the immigrant becomes the last concern of the immigration discussion giving exploitive profiting systems more power. Therefore, it is important that the immigrant's voice is heard and that the economic interests of corporations benefitting from "price associated populations" like the United Fruit Company and the Border Security system are examined in the mainstream discourse so that the public can understand why certain discourses circulate more prevalently than others and why those discourses reveal certain biases and rhetorical strategies.

By listening to the reasons that immigrants are coming into the country, policy makers may be able to come up with tangible solutions that confront the cause of the migrations in the first place. In addition, by listening to the voice that is the least heard but most affected, maybe the American public will be able to find peace and understanding on this subject. For this reason, part of George's interview where he explains his mother's experiences as an undocumented immigrant is shared here.

The parents of interviewee George came to the United States to provide a better life for

him and his siblings. He explained that “it’s very, very difficult to make it in Mexico. People make 50 to 40 dollars a week down there” (personal interview). However, the immigration laws condemn his mother for trying to give her children a more fiscally stable future, because she did not follow the bureaucratic protocol. His mother is now trying to get her residency papers by waiting in Mexico to see if her application to become a resident in the United States will be approved. George explains his mother’s story below:

My mom has never had documentation. My mom’s case is a little bit different. I was born in San Diego; most of my family is from Tijuana. So I have a cousin...my mom’s niece...so my mom was able to use her niece’s documentation. My mom’s niece lives in Tijuana, so she’s like ‘I don’t technically need the documentation.’ She’s got the document saying she was born in the U.S. My mom was working under her niece’s name, not her own name. And the reason is also that, it was kind of a win, win. Because if you think about it, my cousin’s in Mexico; she’s a stay-at-home mom. In the meantime, my mom is working under her name here, so she’s still benefitting off of social security. My mom has been working on her [legalization process] since two years ago when my step dad got his legal residence. He always had his work permit and he got this legal residence two years ago...They ask you [for] documentation about all of your medical records, your kids medical records, their history, obviously all of your taxes. I mean, they ask you a lot of things. They are very thorough; obviously it’s one of those things that you have to be thorough about. But once you get all of that in, you just wait... They told her they got her application and now she just has to wait... You don’t know when it’s coming. Mom’s like ‘I want to go back home. I want to see you and I want to see your sister.’ You know, it’s really funny ‘cause I have a little brother—he’s 5 years old—he did Kindergarten in the U.S. and now he’s doing first grade in Mexico. (personal interview)

George emphasizes that it has been two years and his mom has not heard anything. Her wait for reentry depends on whether she qualifies for the three or ten year reentry bar. To qualify for only three years of waiting, she must prove that she was only in the United States for less than one year, otherwise it will take 10 years for her to wait on a visa ([visalaw.com](http://visalaw.com)). And though George admits that she raised him for over one year in southern California, she was able to raise him under her niece’s identity as a legal resident while her niece lived in Mexico. Now, she must prove, by providing the documents he mentions above, that that she lived in Mexico during that time so that she does not have to wait ten years to legally re-enter.



Although George's mother did break the law by coming to the United States without a visa, she was not part of a criminal organization; she was, and still is, simply trying to provide for her children. As George said, it is much harder to make a good living in Mexico, which is what she tried for the first few years of George's life because she did not have the correct documents to live in the United States. Then for financial reasons around 1992 she moved them back to the United States after George's father had obtained legal status; however, she was still undocumented. George's family faced the economic struggles when Mexico was on the verge of "the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression" (Hing 194). Many citizens of Mexico went into extreme poverty which Hing associates with the "ill-fated privatization of eighteen state-owned banks in 1992" leading to the peso's 50 percent loss of value within a year (194). George also mentions that the policies that make immigrants wait for their papers is difficult because it is so hard to live in Mexico because of its economic downturn. The bureaucratic protocol involved in the application process for legal entry into the United States is another form of rendering order through linguistic means.

The political and legal discourse surrounding immigration policies tend to leave out the main voices of the immigration debate by talking to the American public about immigrants rather than including immigrants in the conversation. Because of this, the language emphasizing the immigration issues becomes combative which stifles conversation and different approaches to solving the problems within the immigration system. Without including the voice of immigrants, documented or undocumented, this population becomes subject to intolerant laws like the Arizona Senate Bill 1070 and exploitive systems. Therefore, it is important to remember that language is socially situated and that "people talk and act not as individuals, but as members of various sorts of social and cultural groups. We do not invent our language, we inherit it from

others” (Gee 177) Consequently, because we inherit our language, we must be careful not to accept the language passed down as “common sense” but instead should analyze the purpose of the language being used. Hence, the general public should make an effort to understand the factors that influence the “other-ing” of immigrants, so that they can identify demonizing discourse and make informed decisions about the immigration system in the United States. By hearing all voices of the immigration discourse, the public can properly analyze the motives behind border security and whether or not these immigration policies are really aimed to protect all Americans or to isolate certain Americans. More importantly, Latino immigrants, who are arguably the most affected by the discussion, should have a voice in the immigration debates. To allow anything less is to perpetuate the voicelessness so gruesomely inscribed in the cadaver that Griest encountered as she attempted to document that state of immigration at the southern border of the United States.

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December 2, 2013

MEMORANDUM

TO: Liza Vammen  
Elias Dominguez Barajas

FROM: Ro Windwalker  
IRB Coordinator

RE: New Protocol Approval

IRB Protocol #: 13-11-310

Protocol Title: *A Comparison of Discourses Surrounding the Latino Immigrant Experience in the United States*

Review Type:  EXEMPT  EXPEDITED  FULL IRB

Approved Project Period: Start Date: 12/2/2013 Expiration Date: 12/1/2014

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Your protocol has been approved by the IRB. Protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. If you wish to continue the project past the approved project period (see above), you must submit a request, using the form *Continuing Review for IRB Approved Projects*, prior to the expiration date. This form is available from the IRB Coordinator or on the Research Compliance website (<http://vpred.uark.edu/210.php>). As a courtesy, you will be sent a reminder two months in advance of that date. However, failure to receive a reminder does not negate your obligation to make the request in sufficient time for review and approval. Federal regulations prohibit retroactive approval of continuation. Failure to receive approval to continue the project prior to the expiration date will result in Termination of the protocol approval. The IRB Coordinator can give you guidance on submission times.

**This protocol has been approved for 3 participants.** If you wish to make *any* modifications in the approved protocol, including enrolling more than this number, you must seek approval *prior to* implementing those changes. All modifications should be requested

in writing (email is acceptable) and must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

If you have questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact me at 210 Administration Building, 5-2208, or [irb@uark.edu](mailto:irb@uark.edu)