

# 8

## Visible Frictions

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The Border Film Project and Self-Representation in  
the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands

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In April 2005, the Minuteman Civil Defense Corps Project, an offshoot of the Minuteman Project, organized an action and publicity event in Tombstone, Arizona, with the goal of attracting media attention to issues concerning “illegal” immigration in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. The Minutemen, as they called themselves, were primarily attempting to influence the perspectives of politicians on U.S. immigration policy during President George W. Bush’s second term, when tensions regarding immigration had become increasingly fraught. Scholars, including Leo R. Chavez, who have written about the Minutemen’s actions in April 2005 have argued that they used their surveillance of undocumented migrants to produce a spectacle on the U.S.-Mexico boundary.<sup>1</sup> The Minutemen’s use of visual technologies of surveillance, as well as how the mainstream media participated in creating a spectacle of the Minutemen’s actions, are a form of social violence.<sup>2</sup>

Between 2005 and 2007, the Border Film Project, described by organizers Brett Huneycutt, Victoria Criado, and Rudy Adler as a “collaborative art” project, also attempted to address conflicts over U.S.-Mexico border policy.<sup>3</sup> The organizers of this documentary photography project distributed disposable cameras in northern Mexico to Mexican and Central American migrants, who were headed to the United States, and to members of the Minuteman Project, who were positioned at “observation sites” along the

U.S. side of the U.S.-Mexico border. Rather than addressing the views of state officials, the Border Film Project focused on individual perspectives of and by migrants and Minutemen to represent what organizers viewed as “both sides” of the debate over U.S. border policy.<sup>4</sup> The photographs taken by migrants and Minutemen first circulated as part of an exhibition in galleries and were the basis for the 2007 book *Border Film Project: Photos by Migrants and Minutemen on the U.S.-Mexico Border*.<sup>5</sup> This emphasis on including photographs by migrants and Minutemen was based on the idea that there is an objective middle ground to what the organizers position as two opposing perspectives.

Although the organizers of the Border Film Project downplay their own roles in the meaning and effect of the images, as curators they made crucial decisions regarding the selection and organization of these photographs in the exhibitions and in the book. By constructing a visual and textual parallel between migrants and Minutemen, the organizers make absent the power differentials between U.S. citizens and undocumented Mexican and Central American migrants in the United States. Further, the organizers evade the specific ways in which the Minutemen have taken part in the U.S. government’s policing of undocumented migrants’ movement from Mexico into the United States and do not address the question of vigilante violence conducted by groups and individuals aligned with the Minuteman Project against undocumented migrants in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. Indeed, an emphasis of the project is the construction of compositional similarity between photographs of migrants and Minutemen.

What does it mean to provide supposedly equal representation and to construct a pictorial equivalence between migrants and Minutemen? These visual arrangements appear intended to convey an immanent parallel between these groups. The artifice of equality and equivalence deployed visually relates to the larger ideological work of the *Border Film Project* to construct an ostensibly neutral middle ground between these two groups, all the while disavowing the curatorial logic of the project’s organizers. How are photographic representations of undocumented migrants and Minutemen articulated through discourses of exhibition and distribution in the *Border Film Project*, and how are these practices inscribed by unequal relations of power? A visual and cultural analysis of the *Border Film Project*, drawing

particularly on the theoretical perspective of photographer and critic Allan Sekula, offers an opportunity to address these questions within the historical and political contexts of the early twenty-first century.

Huneycutt, Criado, and Adler originally conceived of the Border Film Project as a way to “shed light on the issue of ‘illegal’ immigration,” primarily in relation to the U.S.-Mexico border.<sup>6</sup> During the summer of 2005, following the Minuteman Project’s month-long action and publicity event in Tombstone, Arizona, the organizers spent a few weeks traveling and filming on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border. Instead of editing this footage into a film, the group decided to give disposable cameras to Mexican and Central American migrants in Mexico and to members of the Minuteman Project in the United States so that individuals in both groups could “document the border” through their own eyes.<sup>7</sup> In a radio interview, the organizers explained that they felt giving cameras to these groups would enable them to represent themselves and to provide a “more realistic” perspective as opposed to how they had been portrayed in the mainstream media. As a result, the Border Film Project would offer up a different understanding of the effects of U.S. border policy.<sup>8</sup>

The Border Film Project organizers had initially envisioned creating an exhibition of the photographs by migrants. They started by visiting migrant shelters and humanitarian organizations on the Mexican side of the border, explaining their project to migrants in groups.<sup>9</sup> They then taught the migrants how to use disposable cameras and told them how to mail them back to the organizers once they were in the United States. In exchange for mailing back their disposable cameras, the organizers offered each of the migrants a \$25 gift card at Walmart. Later, the organizers distributed cameras in areas where members of the Minuteman Project had set up self-made observation sites near the U.S.-Mexico boundary in Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, and California. If the Minutemen mailed back their cameras to the organizers, they would receive a \$25 gift card at Shell. Minutemen were asked to fill out and include with the camera a card that asked for name, address, age, phone number, e-mail address, hometown, and observation site. These individuals could also indicate if they wanted copies of the pictures and were asked whether the organizers could display their first name, age, and hometown with the images. After the organizers received a substantial

number of cameras back from the migrants and Minutemen, they started to organize exhibitions of their photographs. By 2007, the organizers had received seventy-three cameras, thirty-eight from migrants and thirty-five from Minutemen, with a total of two thousand photographs.<sup>10</sup> With these photographs the Border Film Project organizers held eleven exhibitions in galleries, bookstores, museums, and universities across the United States.<sup>11</sup> In curating the exhibitions, the organizers were interested in creating a balance between the views of migrants and Minutemen. “The exhibit doesn’t pick sides,” the organizers contended in a radio interview, “but instead tells both the migrants’ and Minutemen’s stories.” Rudy Adler stated further, “I hope that people come to the exhibition and can see both sides, hear and listen and decide for themselves what they think the solution to the border situation should be.”<sup>12</sup>

The strategy of self-representation in photography is based on the notion that this form is less mediated and thus more truthful than documentary photography. Self-representation conveys the idea that by looking at these images, the viewer is able to have direct access to the perspectives and experiences of the individuals portrayed. With this focus on self-representation, the organizers’ interest in making these two groups visible, and to privilege visibility as somehow capable of transcending differences and revealing otherwise hidden truths, is curious. Why, in this context, do the organizers presume that visibility is undeniably a good thing? Despite their presumption that the perspectives of migrants and Minutemen needed to become more visible in U.S. society, undocumented Mexican and Central American migrants were already quite visible in the eyes of the state at the time of the project’s production. Indeed, the legal and political consequences of this visibility speak to the differences between these two groups.<sup>13</sup>

Undocumented migrants from Mexico and Central America have had a particularly difficult relation to the U.S. state, both historically and in the moment in which the Border Film Project was produced. For example, the U.S. government’s regulation of the movement of Mexican migrants into the United States since the early twentieth century has involved creating guest worker programs when U.S. industry needed low-wage laborers and deporting these individuals during periods of economic friction.<sup>14</sup> In the United States undocumented migrants are policed by agents of the state,

as well as by groups such as the Minutemen, who operate in tandem with government agencies, particularly the Border Patrol, in surveilling undocumented migrants.

By 2005, when the Border Film Project was being produced, anti-immigrant vigilante groups had already begun to use a range of surveillance technologies, such as night-vision cameras and unmanned aerial drones, to track undocumented migrants.<sup>15</sup> Once “caught,” migrants would be detained (under armed guard) by members of these groups as well as photographed while waiting for the Border Patrol to arrive.<sup>16</sup> The Minutemen and other anti-immigrant groups thus used photography not only as a form of surveillance, but also, like hunters or fishermen, to document their “catch” as trophies. Undocumented migrants had little recourse in preventing their photographs from being taken by the Minutemen or other groups. Many migrants believed the Minutemen were U.S. military personnel, since they and members of other vigilante groups typically dressed in military clothing or clothes similar to those of Border Patrol agents.<sup>17</sup> The Minutemen’s use of cameras has also been more directly abusive, as in a case where members (including a man named Bryan Barton) forced the Mexican migrant they were detaining to hold a T-shirt that said, “Bryan Barton caught an illegal alien and all he got was this lousy T-shirt.”<sup>18</sup> The Minutemen’s use of cameras to surveil migrants, as part of the political content of the early twenty-first century, can be interpreted as an extreme form of objectification.

The growing acceptance of right-wing militia groups, such as the Minutemen, by U.S. politicians and government agencies in the first decade of this century is essential background to a reading of the Border Film Project.<sup>19</sup> The decision of the organizers to represent the Minutemen as furthest out on the political spectrum regarding U.S. border policy downplays the support they received not only from the Department of Homeland Security and the Border Patrol during the George W. Bush administration, but also from members of Congress.<sup>20</sup> Jane Juffer argues that the figure of the Minuteman became “mainstreamed” during the years of the George W. Bush administration, appearing as a helpful citizen “volunteering” to guard the border, rather than as a vigilante who would “take the law in his own hands and punish the ‘illegal aliens’ who can be easily lumped together with terrorists.”<sup>21</sup> Similarly, Roxanne Lynn Doty, in her work on the Minutemen,

has related the success of the group's legitimating activities to its ability to influence decisions made by federal governmental agencies.<sup>22</sup> For example, Doty suggests that Chris Simcox's announcement that the Minutemen Civil Defense Corps Project would build a border security fence unless the White House deployed military resources led to President George W. Bush's plan to send six hundred National Guard troops to the border as well as to sign the Secure Fence Act (2006).<sup>23</sup>

The increased militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border in the early twenty-first century is a critical context for thinking about the self-representation of migrants and Minutemen in the *Border Film Project*. Thus, undocumented migrants are surveilled by state agents, Minutemen, and viewers. The organizers, however, in framing their subjects through the terms of self-representation, present the project as unconstrained by the forms of policing and coercion that are themselves the conditions of possibility for its visual economy of images and, as such, efface how it is complicit with both the Minutemen's and the state's surveillance of undocumented migrants.

The ideas behind the Border Film Project are dominated by the liberal reformist notion that the act of making visible the problems of undocumented migrants and anti-immigrant activists through documentary photography will result in these problems being dealt with through the rational workings of social institutions. This approach assumes an inevitable causal relation between images and action, which drives the belief that making these issues visible will allow them to be rectified. The presumed transparency between images and their meanings espoused by the Border Film Project is reminiscent of how documentary photography was understood during the 1930s—that the camera was an unmediated form of communication and an image-making instrument whose own apparatus necessarily disappears. This emphasis thus sees the meaning of the image as being inherent and immediate for the viewer, rather than being actively produced across multiple fields, including the particular social and institutional conditions of reception, and the interpretive dispositions of the viewer.<sup>24</sup>

The organizers' emphasis on the transparent meaning of photographic self-representation is also apparent in the *Border Film Project: Photos by Migrants and Minutemen on the U.S.-Mexico Border* (2007). While the organizers downplay their curatorial imprint on the book's production, of the

two thousand photographs they received from migrants and Minutemen, they use less than 10 percent in the publication of the *Border Film Project*. The organizers also include short quotations in the book drawn from interviews they conducted with migrants and Minutemen to “give greater depth to the images.” The organizers interviewed migrants in Mexico who planned to cross the U.S.-Mexico border, those already living in the United States, and migrants’ relatives in El Salvador and Mexico. They also interviewed members of the Minuteman Project at observation sites along the U.S.-Mexico border and leaders of the Minuteman Project in Washington, D.C.<sup>25</sup> In addition to the quotations from interviews, the organizers include two statements—one on the “Project Background” of the *Border Film Project* and the other on the topic of “The U.S.-Mexico Border”—both of which are positioned in the center of the book.

In creating a parallel between migrants and Minutemen while developing the *Border Film Project* from an archive of two thousand photographs, the organizers eclipse the inequities between Minutemen and undocumented migrants in the United States. The meaning of photographs, as Sekula notes, “is always directed by layout, captions, text and site and mode of presentation.”<sup>26</sup> In the *Border Film Project*, the organizers’ image choices and ordering, as well as the positioning of quotations from interviews alongside these images, construct a visual equivalence between migrants and Minutemen. In this way, the organizers “produce ‘truths’ that naturalize and legitimate relations of power in part by obscuring the operations of power.”<sup>27</sup> Further, by taking the images of migrants and Minutemen and arranging them without consultation with either group, the *Border Film Project* organizers ideologically subjugate both groups.

The *Border Film Project*, published only in English, appears to be a coffee table book or art monograph, directed toward a U.S.-based audience. The cover design includes an image of a Minuteman and one of a migrant, framed by circular holes cut into the cover, that are divided by a line indicating the boundary between the United States and Mexico. In its design, the cover deemphasizes the role of the Minutemen as surveilling migrants, instead positioning the viewers as surveilling both migrants and Minutemen. Viewers look through the lens-shaped holes in the cover to view photographs of the main subjects of the *Border Film Project*—an undocumented

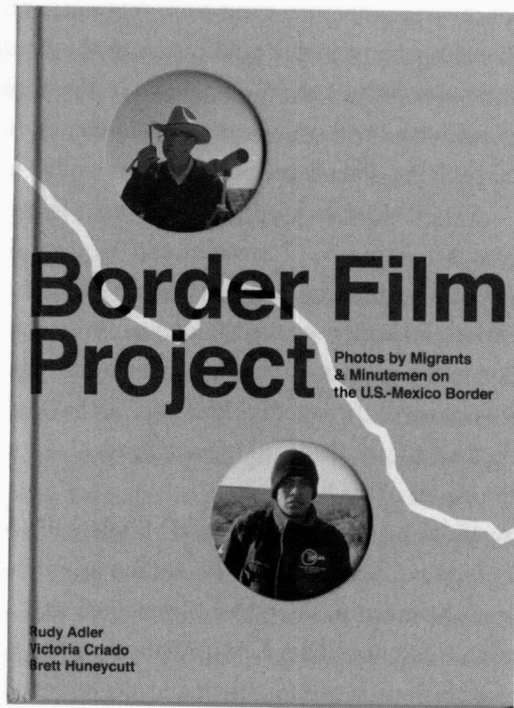


Figure 8.1 The cover of the *Border Film Project* positions the two figures along the U.S.-Mexico border as a form of juxtaposition between the Minutemen and border crossers. Courtesy of Border Film Project.

migrant and a member of the Minuteman Project. The address to an outside audience is also evident in the organizers' statement that the book represents the "human face of immigration" in order to "challenge us to question our stereotypes," which in turn will enable the viewer of these images "to see through new and personal lenses."<sup>28</sup> The organizers' goals for the *Border Film Project* rest on the belief that representing the embodied and personal experiences and perspectives of Mexican and Central American migrants and Minutemen will contribute to a reasoned and balanced approach to reforming U.S. border policy.

In the book, both the form of self-representation and the casual, presumably unselfconscious pictures of migrants and Minutemen are intended to signify reality to the viewer. The project participants were constrained in

portraying their subject matter by the technological limitations of the disposable camera, which resulted in a different aesthetic than that of professional documentary photographers. For example, the absence of an adjustable lens prevented the participants from taking close-ups or wide-angle shots. And, since they returned the cameras to the organizers before processing, the participants could not further shape the images after taking the photographs. In other words, they could not interfere with the negatives—they could not crop or retouch the photographs, and they could not select particular images and dispose of others. As a result, the photographs taken by the migrants and the Minutemen appear uncontrived and much like informal snapshots. These aesthetic qualities of the photographs are intended to validate the self-evidence of the images.

What gets obfuscated by the organizers' choice of self-representation is their role in the construction of the book. One of the fundamental issues with the *Border Film Project* is that the organizers portray it as representing the perspectives of migrants and Minutemen because these individuals took the photographs and are quoted in the book. However, neither migrants nor Minutemen were involved in the process of selecting the photographs or quotations, or in the arranging the images or text within the book. The organizers developed the *Border Film Project* from an archive of photographs taken by migrants and Minutemen, a context that reflects Sekula's statement that "Archives . . . constitute a *territory of images*; the unity of an archive is first and foremost that imposed by ownership."<sup>29</sup> By exchanging their disposable cameras for Shell or Walmart cards, the migrants and Minutemen who participated in the *Border Film Project* relinquished their ownership of their photographs and their control over the organization and circulation of those images.

The arrangement of images in the book appears similar to a form of ordering frequently found in photographic archives.<sup>30</sup> Sekula argues that in photographic archives, an "empiricist model of truth" takes precedence, in which "pictures are atomized, isolated in one way and homogenized in another."<sup>31</sup> The *Border Film Project* replicates this type of organization primarily because of two approaches to arranging the images. First, the organizers separated photographs by migrants from those by Minutemen. With few exceptions, the organizers generally position images of and by migrants across from one another

on full-page spreads, thus isolating them from images of and/or by Minutemen, which are also placed across from one another on full-page spreads. The captions, which consist of quotations from the organizers' interviews with migrants and Minutemen, are situated next to many, although not all, of the images and are ordered in a similar way, with quotations from migrants generally placed next to pictures by migrants, and quotations from Minutemen next to images by Minutemen. In this arrangement, the captions appear to correspond to or directly comment on the specific images with which they are paired. The organizers' second approach was to pair images of migrants and Minutemen that had similar visual elements on full-page spreads.

Although the project's intended focus on self-representation is related to the organizers' attempt to present the "truth" of migrant and Minuteman experiences, the positioning of images constructs a parallel between these two groups as a means to decontextualize their relation to each other. By isolating images of migrants from those of Minutemen, the organizers eclipse the relations of undocumented migrants and Minutemen. Further, when visually similar images by migrants and Minutemen are placed together on full-page spreads, the photographs are "reduced to 'purely visual' concerns," establishing what Sekula has described in his writing about photographic archives as a "relation of *abstract visual equivalence* between pictures."<sup>32</sup> This homogenizing of migrant and Minuteman images through their formal and visual similarities appears related to the organizers' emphasis on linking both groups by their supposed marginality in relation to the U.S. state, and by their shared belief that U.S. border policy is "broken." Yet these two groups are fundamentally at odds with each other. While one group (migrants) tries to enter the United States, the other (Minutemen) attempts to keep them out. Moreover, in the *Border Film Project*, organizers align themselves with a liberal nativist position that, as anthropologist Nicholas De Genova argues, "deracialize[s] the figure of immigration in a manner that abdicates any responsibility for analyzing the racial oppression of migrants of color."<sup>33</sup> In the construction of the *Border Film Project*, Huneycutt, Criado, and Adler deemphasize issues of race and racism within the Minuteman Project, which parallels the official statements of the Minutemen's leaders, who, as Robin Dale Jacobson contends, "while adamantly denying the role of race[in their organization] . . . focus on the schemas of invasion."<sup>34</sup>

The book contains an equal number of photographs taken by Mexican and Central American migrants as by Minutemen. While the Minutemen represent themselves as patriotic U.S. citizens guarding the border, undocumented migrants had more at risk in photographing themselves because their main goal in crossing the U.S.-Mexico border was to evade detection. Almost all the Minutemen's photographs relate to their surveillance of migrants. These photographs include Minutemen surveilling migrant movement, reporting migrants to the Border Patrol, and building the Minuteman fence. The images of the migrants overwhelmingly portray their attempts to hide from the gaze of state agents. The migrants' photographs document their encounters with signs indicating that trespassers will be prosecuted, as well as their challenging travel conditions hiding in trucks, walking for miles through remote areas, climbing over barbed wire fences and walls, and sustaining injuries while doing so. In addition, they also photographed other migrants successfully crossing the U.S.-Mexico border.

In the majority of Minuteman photographs selected by Huneycutt, Criado, and Adler, the Minutemen represent themselves as nonstate actors performing the work of state agents. As such, they dress in military garb, which also suggests that they view themselves as agents of the state engaged in fighting a war. This perspective is further supported by the prevalence of photographs of Minutemen carrying weapons, especially guns; engaging in target practice; looking through binoculars; communicating with each other on walkie-talkies or CB radios; surveilling from portable towers; and "tracking" migrants. Whereas members of the Minuteman Project have been accused of physically assaulting unarmed migrants, some items of their clothing speak directly of their belief that they are defending themselves against invaders, such as a T-shirt that reads "Innocent Bystander." In their photographs, American flags are omnipresent, relating to their view that they are patriotic citizens protecting the borders of "their" country.

The photographs the Minutemen took of migrants, which are included in the *Border Film Project*, need to be situated in a larger context in which members of the Minuteman Project and other anti-immigrant groups use imaging and surveillance technologies to both harass unauthorized migrants and make them visible to the state. Minutemen's photographs of migrants portray them as committing the crime of crossing the U.S.-Mexico boundary

“illegally.” Most often the Minutemen photographed migrants being detained by a Minuteman or apprehended by Border Patrol. The Minutemen did not include themselves in the photographs detaining migrants, which would have visualized the relationship between migrants and Minutemen. Instead they appear to have used their cameras as weapons to detain the migrants while they waited for Border Patrol to arrive. For example, on a two-page spread of photographs, the Minuteman is not visible within the boundaries of the physical picture, but the camera serves as his weapon, a form of surveillance. The viewer is led to conclude that the figure visually present in the photograph is an undocumented border crosser, creating a narrative in which the Minutemen are partners with the U.S. Border Patrol. While the Minutemen’s use of the camera to detain migrants is a legal act, it can also be seen as a form of what Justin Akers Chacón describes as “low intensity terrorism,” in which anti-immigrant activists use cameras to harass Latino/a migrants in part by threatening to show these photographs to state agents, which could lead to migrants’ detention and deportation.<sup>35</sup>

Most of the images of and by Minutemen and migrants are on separate pages, with the exceptions showing both on the same full-page spread when the images seem similar in appearance or content. Two photographs in the book—one of a Minuteman couple and the other of a migrant couple—make this point directly. By placing these photos next to each other, the organizers attempt to emphasize the similarities between the kissing migrant couple and the Anglo couple at dinner. Huneycutt, Criado, and Adler also invite viewers to note the comparable living conditions between the two groups, juxtaposing one interior shot taken by a migrant next to another by a member of the Minuteman Project. There are many similar photographic equivalences in the book and on the website, where the images are organized under three categories—“Migrants,” “Minutemen,” and “Similarities,” the latter referring to photographs by migrants and Minutemen that share elements of composition or subject matter.<sup>36</sup> The website categories speak to how the organizers both isolate the two groups from one another visually while also lumping together images by Minutemen and migrants that resemble one another superficially in an attempt to relate these two groups by making absent the different context in which these photographs were taken.

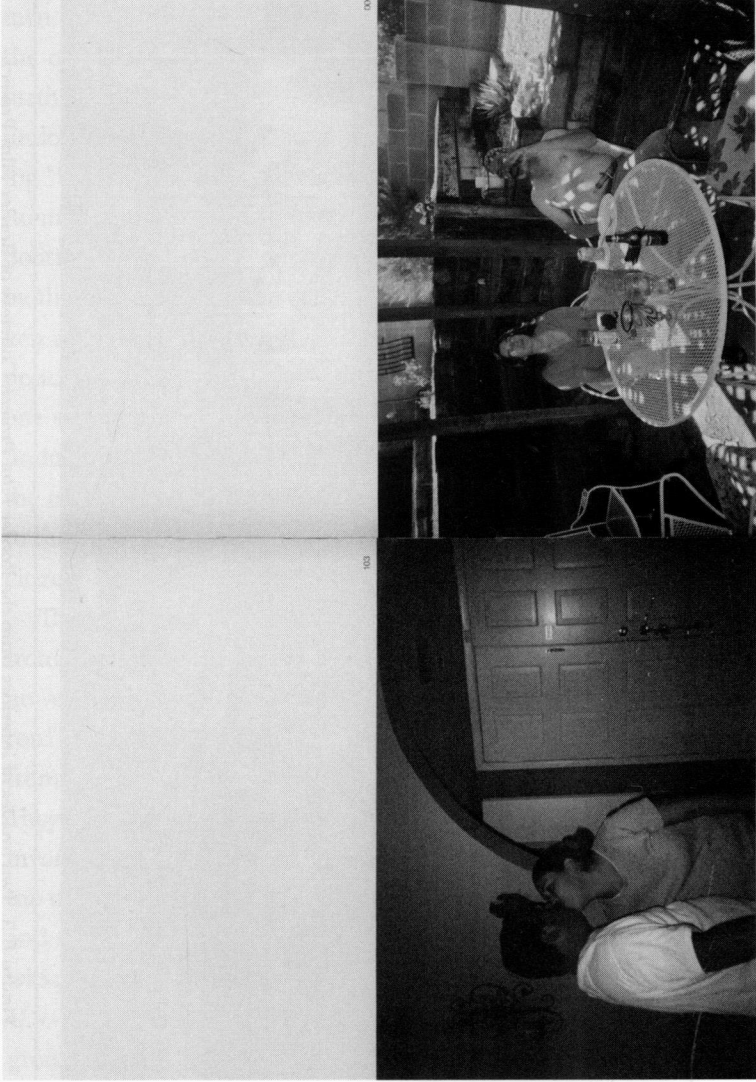


Figure 8.2 Two images of couples from the *Border Film Project*. Courtesy of Border Film Project.



Figure 8.3 Two images of interiors from the *Border Film Project*. Courtesy of Border Film Project.

The idea behind the Border Film Project was to use photography, specifically a form of self-representation, to convey the truth of the experiences of undocumented Mexican and Central American migrants and Minutemen. In presenting their subjects through the vehicle of self-representation, the organizers portray the project as unmediated. This interpretation is further supported by the organizers' interest in exhibiting photographs by undocumented migrants and Minutemen, whom they view as representing "both sides" of the debate over U.S. border policy. In addition to positioning undocumented migrants and Minutemen on opposite ends of the political spectrum concerning U.S. border policy, the organizers relate them by their supposed shared belief that the "U.S. border policy system is broken and needs to be fixed."<sup>37</sup> The perception that these groups view this policy as "broken" does not indicate common ground. In emphasizing this one shared value, as well as by constructing a visual equivalence between undocumented Mexican and Central American migrants and Minutemen, the organizers do not acknowledge the different relations of these groups to the U.S. state and thus make absent the power differentials between U.S. citizens and undocumented migrants in the United States.

The organizers position the Border Film Project as the rational center from which U.S. border policy should be developed. As Mike Davis argues, however, "'Rational border policy' is simply a fantasy, if not a sheer oxymoron."<sup>38</sup> The limitations of the Border Film Project seem to stem at least in part from the organizers' choice not to delve into the root causes of migration. They do not, for example, frame the issues globally, which, in this case, would involve an examination of the role of the United States in contributing to the unauthorized migration of individuals from Mexico, Central America, and elsewhere. The organizers' perspective also makes absent the ways in which U.S. border policies have led to the increased militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border, which has contributed to the growth of anti-immigrant groups while also producing the "illegality" of migrants from Mexico.<sup>39</sup>

The organizers' decisions have other consequences as well. In representing the *Border Film Project* as unmediated, they present the project as (at least partially) about migrants representing themselves and their experiences. This perspective ostensibly authenticates the project. Yet, by taking up a liberal nativist position in relation to unauthorized migration, they

also position the migrants' photographs in very particular ways. While the migrants who participated in the Border Film Project visually represent their experiences traveling through the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, the organizers frame these images as documenting the migrants' "illegal" movement. The organizers state that the migrants, through their involvement with the project, are able to represent their own experiences, but this claim is contradicted by how they are framed in the *Border Film Project*. In other words, the migrants do not construct their own activity as "illegal."

In addition to Minutemen surveilling migrants, by participating in the Border Film Project, these migrants also surveilled each other. The Border Film Project organizers viewed their act of giving cameras to migrants and Minutemen as a humanitarian gesture, because they enabled their subjects to portray their own lives. Yet there are implications in using photography to *document* Mexican and Central American migrants' "illegal" passage into the United States considering the federal government's emphasis on national security in the post-9/11 era. This project was thus complicit with the surveillance of migrants by state agents in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands.

By ignoring the context of the photographs taken by the Minutemen, which are intricately connected to their surveillance of migrants on the U.S. side of the border, the Border Film Project organizers make invisible the specificity of uses and meanings these images have for these groups. As Sekula argues, "in an archive, the possibility of meaning is 'liberated' from the actual contingencies of use"; this "abstraction from the complexity and richness of use, a loss of context," certainly applies in this case.<sup>40</sup> The "uses" of these photographs, which are related to the Minutemen's surveillance and policing of undocumented migrants, are made absent in the *Border Film Project*. Although the Minutemen use cameras rather than guns to detain migrants, they employ visual technologies as a means to exert power over undocumented migrants. The Minutemen's use of imaging and surveillance technologies, including cameras, in their attempts to make migrants "visible" to the state needs to be understood as a form of social violence. Through the Border Film Project, including the circulation of the disposable cameras, the photographs, and the coffee table book, the organizers participate in the Minutemen's efforts. In this sense, the Border Film Project is complicit with

the Minutemen's use of visual technologies to surveil, detain, and document unauthorized migrants.

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## Notes

1. Leo R. Chavez, *The Latino Threat: Constructing Immigrants, Citizens, and the Nation* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), 145.
2. Scholars including Jodie M. Lawston and Ruben R. Murillo have also related the spectacle of the Minuteman Project, as well as that of former Maricopa County sheriff Joseph Arpaio, and the escalation of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids and detention of immigrants in the years that followed. Jodie M. Lawston and Ruben R. Murillo, "Policing Our Border, Policing Our Nation: An Examination of the Ideological Connections between Border Vigilantism and U.S. National Ideology" in *Beyond Walls and Cages: Prisons, Borders, and Global Crisis*, ed. Jenna Loyd, Matt Mitchelson, and Andrew Burridge (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012), 181–89.
3. See the Border Film Project's website, <http://www.borderfilmproject.com>, for the use of the term "collaborative." I understand their use of the term to mean that they believe they are collaborating with the photographers.
4. This quotation is from a radio interview with Rudy Adler and Brett Huneycutt on NPR's *Weekend Edition* in September 2006. It is archived on the Border Film Project's website: <http://www.borderfilmproject.com/en/press>.
5. Rudy Adler, Victoria Criado, and Brett Huneycutt, *Border Film Project: Photos by Migrants and Minutemen on the U.S.-Mexico Border* (New York: Abrams, 2007).

6. Adler, Criado, and Huneycutt, "Project Background," *Border Film Project*, n.p.
7. Ibid.
8. Adler and Huneycutt interview, NPR.
9. According to a map with distribution points labeled in the center of the book, the organizers gave out cameras to migrants primarily in the northern border states of Sonora and Chihuahua.
10. Adler, Criado, and Huneycutt, "Project Background."
11. See "Exhibitions," Border Film Project, accessed November 1, 2017, <http://www.borderfilmproject.com/en/exhibitions>.
12. Adler and Huneycutt interview, NPR.
13. In Nicholas De Genova's essay "The Legal Production of Mexican/Migrant 'Illegality,'" *Latino Studies* 2 (July 2004): 178, he writes about the visibility of "illegal" immigration in the first decade of the twenty-first century.
14. See James Cockcroft, *Outlaws in the Promised Land: Mexican Immigrant Workers and America's Future* (New York: Grove Press, 1986); and Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).
15. Wayne Cornelius, "Controlling 'Unwanted Immigration': Lessons from the United States, 1993–2004," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 31 (July 2005): 784.
16. See Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States, *Undocumented Migrant, Legal Resident, and U.S. Citizen Victims of Anti-Immigrant Vigilantes, United States*, Admissibility Report No. 78/08, Petition 478-05, August 5, 2009, 4, <http://www.cidh.oas.org/annualrep/2009eng/USA478-05eng.htm>.
17. Some Minutemen have even worn badges that read "Undocumented Border Patrol Agent," which include color copies of the Department of Homeland Security seal on them. Ibid.
18. Jane Juffer, introduction to "The Last Frontier?: Contemporary Configuration of the U.S.-Mexico Border," ed. Jane Juffer, special issue, *South Atlantic Quarterly* 105 (Fall 2006): 674.
19. Roxanne Lynn Doty, *The Law into Their Own Hands: Immigration and the Politics of Exceptionalism* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2009), 41. Robin Dale Jacobson argues, "The Minuteman Project in the 1990s would have been a fringe group from which the mainstream restrictionist forces would have attempted to distance themselves. In 2006 the line between mainstream and extreme restrictionist forces is not so clear." Robin Dale Jacobson, *The New Nativism: Proposition 187 and the Debate Over Immigration* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 143.

20. Juffer, introduction to "Last Frontier?," 671. See also Justin Akers Chacón and Mike Davis, *No One Is Illegal: Fighting Racism and State Violence on the U.S.-Mexico Border* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2006), 241.
21. Juffer, introduction to "Last Frontier," 666.
22. In May 2005 when the U.S. House Committee on Government Reform held a hearing on border security, the National President of the Border Patrol Council testified about the significance of the work of the Minutemen along the border. During these hearings, Minuteman Project cofounder Chris Simcox was also asked to testify. Doty, *Law into Their Own Hands*, 41.
23. *Ibid.*, 97. The Secure Fence Act was passed in September 2006 and signed by President Bush in October 2006.
24. See Allan Sekula, "On the Invention of Photographic Meaning," in *Photography in Print: Writings from 1816 to the Present*, ed. Vicki Goldberg (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988), 452–73; and Mary Price, *The Photograph: A Strange, Confined Space* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994).
25. Adler, Criado, and Huneycutt, "Project Background."
26. Allan Sekula, "Photography between Labor and Capital," in *Mining Photographs and Other Pictures, 1948–1968: A Selection from the Negative Archives of Shedden Studio, Glatt Buy, Cape Breton*, ed. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh and Robert Wilkie (Halifax: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1983), 195–96.
27. *Ibid.*, 193.
28. Adler, Criado, and Huneycutt, "Project Background."
29. Sekula, "Photography between Labor and Capital," 194.
30. The ordering of the images can be deciphered by consulting the "Camera Photographer's Information" section at the center of the book. Adler, Criado, and Huneycutt, *Border Film Project*.
31. Sekula, "Photography between Labor and Capital," 197.
32. *Ibid.*, 194.
33. Nicholas De Genova, *Working the Boundaries: Race, Space and "Illegality" in Mexican Chicago* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 72.
34. For example, Robin Dale Jacobson notes, "In August 2006, their website featured articles on the Reconquista movement, 'Hezbollah invading U.S. from Mexico,' [and] undocumented immigrants' claims about political takeover." The Minutemen also state on the Minuteman Project website that their organization "has no affiliation with, nor will we accept any assistance by or interference from, separatist, racist, or supremacy groups." Jacobson, *New Nativism*, 143.
35. Akers Chacón and Davis, *No One Is Illegal*, 251.
36. See the Border Film Project's website: <http://www.borderfilmproject.com>.

37. Adler, Criado, and Huneycutt, "Project Background."
38. Mike Davis, foreword to *Operation Gatekeeper: The Rise of the "Illegal Alien" and the Making of the U.S.-Mexico Boundary*, by Joseph Nevins (New York: Routledge, 2002), xi.
39. Ibid.
40. Sekula, "Photography between Labor and Capital," 194.