



**CCIS**

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## **On Vigilantism: a Model**

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Deaths in the desert are epiphenomenal of multiple US Border Policies and are the primary concern of our work. Vigilantism is epiphenomenal of the embedded social and cultural elements of racism, bigotry, resentment, and indifference. Policies and cultural elements must be considered in any border analysis. All four of these elements call for at least minimal theory construction or an operational theoretical framework. We are grateful for the work of this group of scholars and particularly grateful for the work of similar groups, most notably the path-breaking work of the University of Houston on migrant death research.

Vigilantism mirrors US Border policies in general. Regrettably, these policies are supported by both elected officials and high level public administrators. Like humanitarianism, vigilantism is sedimented in law, in the police powers of the general public, in the rights of individuals to bear arms, and in the kind of state initiatives we are seeing in the Protect Arizona Now Initiative. The negative cultural elements I have mentioned find their way quickly into the use of weapons and to the use of force and violence. At times, they quickly segue and become intertwined. Case in point: One Border Patrol agent regularly networks with Chris Simcox, founder of Civil Homeland Defense. As an agent, the man already accepts the use of force against migrants, and he encourages citizens to embrace his vision of a border by standing with those who are being

prosecuted for taking the law into their own hands. This was further evident in a protest in Yuma on Friday and will be still more evident at a sentencing hearing tomorrow in Yuma. We stand with the prosecutor.

At the state level, we certainly know how to prosecute in the individual case. I point to the arrest, conviction, and sentencing of a Phoenix man who murdered a Sikh man whom the murderer identified as an Arab right after 9-11. In the collective case, that is, the more organized expression of vigilantism, the task is more difficult. It is more insidious, and in my judgement, more offensive, more to be abhorred, and more to be resisted. However, both have the same moral and cultural roots.

Look for a moment at the most visible vigilante-types in Arizona. Ranch Rescue is run by Jack Foote from Abilene, Texas. Purportedly this organization is most concerned with private property laws and national sovereignty questions. Private property laws are very different in Texas than in Arizona. I cite the case of the rancher who shot down a Border Patrol helicopter in the mid 80s without prosecution as evidence of property law differences between states. That said, the same questions of property rights and national sovereignty are of concern to many people living in Cochise County, Arizona, thus the semi-warm reception of Ranch Rescue there. This para-military bunch of weekend warriors is limited to working on private property. Funding is opportunistic, that is, those playing soldier pay their own way. This organization has a major civil

lawsuit against it in Texas for rights violations of migrants. However, even if the suit is won, that does not diminish the public sentiment that gives rise to its expression.

Civil Homeland Defense is run by Chris Simcox. He and his followers operate on private property and some Arizona State Trust lands. His work is again limited to the lands on which he can legally operate. It is hard to pin down his primary objectives since he re-defines who he is each month. He recently reached out to me calling himself a humanitarian. Tomorrow, he will be in Yuma to support those who were unlawfully detaining migrants at gunpoint. Funding for Civil Homeland Defense is a little more diffuse in the public, usually from participants. Border Patrol Intelligence reported to me that Simcox has had some funding from an "outside" group. Simcox has federal firearms violation charges pending.

American Border Patrol is run by Glenn Spencer. We Arizonans certainly want to thank Californians for showing him the highway. This man is, in my opinion, the most dangerous of them all, because he is a culture warrior. He sees things from a Michael Savage point of view: everything is borders, race, language, culture, the whole mess. His playground is more diffuse, virtually not-geographical. He annually raises over \$400,000 for his work. These elements increase his long-term financial viability.

I know the crazy rancher Roger Barnett, Chris Simcox, and Glenn Spencer as well as some of the other unnamed border restriction activists in Arizona. Spencer is the most to be watched because he can project into virtual or hyper reality and mobilize folks to increase the participation of those who would express his sentiments even if they are thousands of miles away. Through his website, he may actually lead people to some of the other groups.

Back to racism, bigotry, resentment, and indifference. None is happy with the inexorable south to north migration except employers. Land owners have properties trashed. Federal, State, and Tribal land managers are outraged at the effects of the migration. Local law enforcement is ill-equipped. Elected officials are not happy with costs or enraged voters. Health care providers are forced to absorb inordinate costs. Environmentalists are not happy. Taxpayers are not happy. Civil and Human Rights organizations are not happy. Then, there's the perceived, if not real, economic issues. My colleagues who disaggregated California Prop 187 voting behavior, found economic issues to explain more than 50% of the variance. That is significant.

Critical school thinking has long told us that if legal-political order is not accomplished, alternative forms of power will prevail. Contrary to the conventional Liberal/Conservative split, I assure you that vigilante power expression can come from either side. Studies have shown that folks who

hold memberships in groups against population growth or radical environmental groups are likely to hold memberships in restrictionist immigration groups.

Current federal administrators are bent on re-defining all border issues in terms of security. Our Senator, Jon Kyl recently said of those whom we are loosely calling vigilantes that he fully understands their frustrations. Translation: This senator supports them. Certainly, the State of Arizona must step in. We need the power of the legal-political model for change. Unfortunately, Arizona investigates abuse claims about as often as Utah investigates polygamy.

What is left for those of us who work in transformative faith traditions is to fully engage the moral-cultural model. Both the legal-political and the moral-cultural model require substantive discourse around level tables for which participants are adequately prepared. The ill-defined political culture of Arizona and the comparatively small influence of main-line denominations and the peace protestants make this a difficult challenge. The immediate burden falls, then, on the less politically active Hispanic voters and activists.

The required discourse is about alterity: others and otherness. If we are going to react to others, we need also to look at ourselves to see why we are reacting the way we are and whether we like what we see.

