



2012-12-07

# Who is an American? The Construction of American Identity in the Utah Minuteman Project

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Who Is an American? The Construction of American Identity  
in the Utah Minuteman Project

Michele Enciso Bendall

A thesis submitted to the faculty of  
Brigham Young University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Science

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December 2012

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## ABSTRACT

### Who Is an American? The Construction of American Identity in the Utah Minuteman Project

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The Minuteman Project is a national civilian border patrol group, founded in 2005, to defend the U.S.-Mexico border from “invasion” by illegal immigrants and protest the “blatant disregard of the rule of law” exhibited by government and politicians. This study explores one state chapter of this organization: the Utah Minuteman Project (UMP).

The research questions I seek to address are: Who are the Minutemen? What motivates them? How do the Minutemen define what it means to be an American? Using a grounded theory approach, I explore the construction of American identity among the members of the UMP using a range of qualitative data sources: in-depth interviews with 24 individuals, fieldnotes, and primary documents.

My findings suggest that what problematizes illegal immigration in the minds of the Minutemen is their view that illegal immigration is a threat to American identity. While illegal immigration and its perceived consequences are the focus of much attention within the UMP, the central motivating factor in the movement relates to the question of who is an American. My findings suggest that American identity, as defined by the Minutemen, can be understood in terms of four main concepts: assimilation, respect for law, work ethic, and patriotism.

In many ways, the Minutemen have defined American identity by answering the question of who is *not* an American. It is against the backdrop of illegal immigration that anti-illegal immigrant movements like the Minutemen have defined themselves, defined America, and defined who is an American. By emphasizing the elements of American identity that stand in most striking contrast to illegal immigration, they exclude undocumented immigrants from American identity.

Amidst all the voices seeking to define what it means to be an American, this study contributes another voice and provides a better understanding of how the Minutemen see the world. It is important that as our country confronts the challenges of immigration reform and answers the question of who is an American, that all voices are heard, including the voices of the Minutemen.

Keywords: American identity, illegal immigration, the Minuteman Project, immigration

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I sincerely thank my advisor and mentor, Dr. Charlie Morgan, for first introducing me to sociology. Thank you for nourishing my development as a sociologist, allowing me the space to learn on my own but always being there when I needed guidance and support. I express my gratitude to Dr. Howard Bahr and Dr. Todd Goodsell for contributing their expertise and knowledge, and most of all, for their patience. I thank my research partner, Keaton Robertson; this project would not have been the same without you. I wish to thank the members of the Utah Minuteman Project, Jim Gilchrist, and Ron Mortensen, who so graciously donated their time and perspectives to this project.

Nadine and Crystal, thank you for giving me a place to call home, for comic relief after long and tiring days, and of course, for the countless rides to and from campus.

I would like to thank my grandparents, Nguyễn Thế Doanh and Nguyễn Thị Xuân, for teaching me the importance of education and for encouraging me to reach higher. To my father, Julio Enciso, thank you for instilling in me the values of hard work and discipline that have enabled me to succeed. I would not be here if it weren't for my mother, Kim Nguyen Enciso. Your strength and courage have inspired everything I have accomplished in my life. You left everything behind so that I could live the American dream. You have always had faith in me, loved me, and supported me every step of the way. All that I am, I owe to you.

Finally, I express my appreciation to my husband, Matthew. You have stood by my side and encouraged me to reach my potential in every way. When I was discouraged or wanted to give up, you knew exactly what to say to uplift me and renew my determination. Your unwavering love and support have carried me throughout this journey. Thank you for believing in me. I could not have done it without you.

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## Introduction

During high school, I worked in my parents' sewing shop alongside other teenagers from Guatemala and Mexico. In my rusty Spanish and their broken English, we would talk about school, our families, and our dreams for the future. One night, Sanchez, who grew up in Mexico, told me how he came to the United States. A *coyote* led him and a few others through the desert for three nights. They traveled during the night so that it would be more difficult to be seen by the border patrol. Soon into the trip they ran out of water and Sanchez told me he thought he was going to die. He made it across the border, but was soon shoved in the trunk of the car where he spent another 30 hours traveling to join the rest of his family in Oregon. He worked after school so he could help support his family. He was kind, intelligent, and hardworking. He was also undocumented, so attending college was an unattainable dream. As a fifteen-year old girl, I learned that the only thing that set me apart from Sanchez was legal status. After work that night, I wrote in my journal that I had discovered what I wanted to do with my life: to work with children of immigrants, help them find funding to go to college and realize their dreams. Although he never knew it, Sanchez changed my life forever.

I did not know anything about the Minutemen until I watched an episode of the reality television series, *30 Days*, in Dr. Morgan's Multicultural America class my senior year of college. The episode featured a Minuteman who goes to live with a family of illegal Mexican immigrants in Los Angeles. I was fascinated by the show and could not understand how someone could have those viewpoints. Ironically, I was presented with the opportunity to work as a research assistant studying the Utah Minuteman Project (UMP) that same semester. From what I had read about the Minutemen, I was certain that they stood in opposition to everything that I stood *for*. However, I also knew that in order to make real change in immigration policies, I needed to understand both sides of the debate and readily accepted the position.

The Minutemen Project (MMP) is a national civilian border patrol group, founded in 2005 to defend the U.S.-Mexico border from “invasion” by illegal immigrants and protest the “blatant disregard of the rule of law” exhibited by government and politicians (interview with Jim Gilchrist, founder of the MMP). This study explores one state chapter of this organization: the Utah Minuteman Project (UMP).

There are many representations of the Minutemen, and some are favorable. National public opinion surveys have shown that the majority of respondents support border efforts like those orchestrated by The Minuteman Project (Kohut et al. 2006). In 2005, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger praised the efforts of the Minutemen and said, “I think they've done a terrific job ... They've cut down the crossing of illegal immigrants a huge percentage. So it just shows that it works when you go and make an effort and when you work hard” (Nicholas & Salladay 2005).

Other representations of the Minutemen are not so favorable. At a joint press conference with Mexican President Vicente Fox, President Bush condemned the Minuteman Project and stated, "I'm against vigilantes in the United States of America ... I'm for enforcing the law in a rational way" (The Washington Times 2005b).

Not only are there various perceptions of the Minutemen, but those perceptions are shifting over time. In 2007, the Southern Poverty Law Center added The Minuteman Project to its list of extreme nativist groups (Southern Poverty Law Center 2007). Today, however, the Minuteman Project is no longer considered to be an extreme nativist group.

Amidst the many portrayals of the Minutemen, I sought to figure out who the Minutemen really were. I used ethnography to spend time with the Minutemen, get to know them, and listen to them, so that I could understand, from their perspective, how they see the world. The research

questions I seek to address are: Who are the Minutemen? What motivates them? How do the Minutemen define what it means to be an American? Using a grounded theory approach, I explore the construction of American identity among the members of the UMP using a range of qualitative data sources: in-depth interviews with 21 individuals, fieldnotes and primary documents.

My findings suggest that what problematizes illegal immigration in the minds of the Minutemen is their view that illegal immigration is a threat to American identity. While illegal immigration and its perceived consequences are the focus of much attention within the UMP, the central motivating factor in the movement surrounds the question of who is an American. The Minutemen view illegal immigration as a threat because they believe it weakens American identity, blurring the lines between who is and who is not an American.

This paper is divided into five sections. First, I will provide background and organizational context of both the MMP and UMP organizations. Second, I will briefly introduce the literature on American identity. The third section describes the methods and procedures used in this study, our entry into the field, how we gained access to the group and established rapport, and the analysis of the data. The fourth and fifth sections are an overview on the MMP and UMP organizations. The sixth section reports my main findings surrounding the construction of American identity. The discussion section highlights the main theoretical contributions of this study. The conclusion summarizes the study, outlines limitations of the research, and suggests avenues for future research. The afterward is a reflection on my exit from the field and the research process.

## **Background**

The MMP is part of a larger group of conservative pro-enforcement and anti-illegal immigrant movements “whose existence revolves around the concept of borders and the fear that borders are not quite as secure, fixed in meaning, and impermeable as might have once been thought” (Doty 2009:7). As undocumented immigration has moved to the forefront of the political arena, membership and donations to civilian border groups and other anti-illegal immigrant organizations have greatly increased (Uranga 2006). Doty (2006:7) argues that these civilian border groups “do not arise and exist in isolation....Nor are they without social and political significance.” She argues that the significance of these groups is more than just the media attention they receive: “Their practices...have the effect of socially constructing an enemy who presents a danger to social order. This gives rise to and justifies practices (and policies) that otherwise would fly in the face of most of our notions of democracy and human/civil rights” (Doty 2006:12). Some of the most visible border vigilante groups include Chris Simcox’s Minuteman Civilian Defense Corps (MCDC), the American Border Patrol (ABP), Border Guardians, and the US Border Guard & Border Rangers

The Utah Minuteman Project is a Utah-based anti-illegal immigrant movement formed by a group of Utah citizens who volunteered as Minutemen as part of Jim Gilchrist’s MMP. Although the UMP organizational by-laws state that it is a “self-governing entity,” the UMP is part of a larger statewide movement to reduce immigration levels and to promote immigration enforcement as a member of the Utah Coalition on Illegal Immigration (UCII), an umbrella organization for conservative anti-illegal immigrant movements in Utah. The UCII argues that “Those who circumvent the legal process jeopardize society on many levels including taking American citizens' jobs, using taxpayer-funded services, engaging in illegal activities and undermining national security” (Utah Coalition on Illegal Immigration 2010).

The UCII is comprised of the UMP, Utahns for Immigration Reform and Enforcement (UFIRE), Utah Eagle Forum, Citizens Council on Illegal Immigration, Repeal 116, CitizensForTaxFairness.org, SaveUtah.net, Utah Tea Party 912 Group, the American Leadership Fund and the Restoration of Freedom Foundation. The UCII is connected to the larger national movement to restrict immigration, as its spokesperson, Ron Mortensen, is a fellow at the Center for Immigration Studies (CIS), one of the largest immigration restrictionist research institutes in the United States (Southern Poverty Law Center 2009). In regard to the connection UMP has with other conservative movements, Terry, the Chairman of the UMP stated:

All of the patriot groups of course have this underlying theme. Which is our constitutional order is threatened and that we must combine, we must unite, in order to bring back the vision of the founding fathers. So, in that sense we are fully engaged across the spectrum of these threats to our order, and there is not just one. We deem illegal immigration to be the greatest threat...

While the UMP and other individual groups operate and act independently, by coming together as a coalition they have more political power (interview with Ron Mortensen, spokesperson of UCII).

The pro-enforcement and anti-illegal immigrant movements are a powerful force in shaping public policy, and more importantly, defining what it means to be an American. Movements like the Minutemen seek to redefine American identity in a way that excludes those who do not have legal authorization to be in the United States. With an estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants in the United States, the actions of these groups have severe implications. As these groups are successful in defining who is an American and who is not, they are better able to justify policies that exclude those they define as “un-American.”

## **Literature Review**

Although I explored the literature after conducting fieldwork, for clarity and organizational purposes, I present a review of relevant literature at this point in the paper. This chapter will first explore the literature on identity, specifically American identity. I then engage in a discussion with American identity scholars seeking to address specifically how immigrants, both legal and illegal, fit into the contemporary definition of what it means to be an American.

### **Identity**

There are three key aspects of identity: personal, social and collective (Owens 2003). Personal identities are both attached to individuals and internalized by them, social identities tend to attach to groups, and collective identities tend to attach to demographic categories (Owens 2003). National identity, like other social identities, creates solidarity among its members, aligns individual interests with national welfare, and motivates individuals to be good citizens (Brewer 2009:154-155). While there have been various studies of national identity (Hogg 2003; Reicher & Hopkins 2001; Habermas 1992; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher and Wetherell 1987), for the scope of this paper I will focus specifically on American identity.

### **American Identity**

National identities are typically founded on a common language, religion, or ethnic heritage. American identity, however, is ideological in nature, defined in terms of a commitment to a set of values and political principles (Gleason 1980; Huntington 1981; Harrington 1980; Citrin, Reingold & Green 1990). In his classic study on American society, Gunnar Myrdal (1962:3) argued that “Americans of all national origins, classes, regions, creeds, and colors, have something in common: a social *ethos*, a political creed.” Myrdal (1962) asserted that the *American Creed*, rooted in the philosophy of enlightenment, Christianity and English law,

encompasses the ideals of liberty, equality, justice, and fair treatment of all people. Historian Richard Hofstadter stated, “It has been our fate as a nation not to have ideologies but to be one” (Kohn 1957:13).

While scholars generally agree that commitment to the *American Creed* is a key component of American identity, some argue that it American identity is *more* than the *American Creed*. Holloway (2011:107) outlines two broad schools of thought within the American identity literature. The first favors a more exclusive definition of American identity, consisting of both adherence to the American Creed *and* participation in America’s core Anglo-Protestant culture. The second favors a more open view of American identity, “properly defined by acceptance of the creed alone” (Holloway 2011:107). While there are many definitions of American identity, the way that one defines American identity, has significant implications. Citrin et al. (1990:1147-1148) assert that “an individual’s conception of American identity influences his or her attitudes toward minorities and their perceived impact on society’s well-being.” With such important implications, it is no surprise that so many are seeking to change how American identity is defined.

One of the most well-known scholars advocating a more exclusive definition of American identity is Samuel Huntington. In his book *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity*, Samuel Huntington (2004:59) argues that the Anglo-Protestant culture of the founding settlers “has been the central and lasting component of American identity.” He contends that this culture “gave birth to the American Creed” and has enabled immigrants, as they assimilate into this culture, to achieve the American Dream (Huntington 2004:62).

Huntington (2004:40) defines the Anglo-Protestant culture as the institutions, practices, and values inherited from England and Protestantism, including “the Christian religion,

Protestant values and moralism, a work ethic, the English language, British traditions of law, justice, and the limits of government power, and a legacy of European art, literature, philosophy, and music.” He argues that “the single most immediate and most serious challenge to America's traditional identity comes from the immense and continuing immigration from Latin America, especially from Mexico, and the fertility rates of these immigrants compared to black and white American natives” (Huntington 2004b:30). Huntington contends that unlike earlier waves of immigrants, “Mexican immigrants and their progeny have not assimilated into American society” (Huntington 2004:222). He further argues that the “contiguity, numbers, illegality, regional concentration, persistence, and historical presence ... pose problems for the assimilation of people of Mexican origin into American society” (Huntington 2004:230). Huntington argues that these structural and historical factors surrounding Mexican immigration make the assimilation of Mexican immigrants unlikely, if not impossible.

Many scholars have responded to Huntington’s claims, presenting their own definition of American identity (Capetillo-Ponce 2005; Chavez 2008; Citrin, Lerman, Murakami & Pearson 2007; Holloway 2011; Honig 2001; Li & Brewer 2004; Luibhéid 2002; Ngai 2004; Portes & Rumbaut 2006).

Li & Brewer (2004:737) found that respondents defined American identity “in terms of cultural homogeneity and something close to a nativistic, ethnic construal of what it means to be an American.” However, others scholars reject the idea that American identity is cultural and linguistic homogeneity. Capetillo-Ponce (2005:158) argues that “Being loyal to America, for Latinos, doesn’t necessarily mean discarding their own cultural heritage.” He asserts that they can embrace multiple identities, “both cultural and national, that allows them to dream in English and Spanish too.”

Some scholars see American identity as synonymous with tolerance and an acceptance of all people, based on the values universalism and egalitarianism promoted within the *American Creed*. Holloway (2011:113) contends that it is these values that have influenced America's elites to believe that "any person can make a good American," and that it would be "unjust if some people are excluded from the benefits of membership in the American community."

Others have put Huntington's assertions to the test (Rumbaut, Massey and Bean 2006; Citrin et al. 2007). Drawing data from two longitudinal surveys, the Immigration and Intergenerational Mobility and Metropolitan Los Angeles (IIMMLA), and the Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study (CILS), Rumbaut et al. (2006:448) found that "Spanish in no way constitutes a threat to the continued predominance of English within the United States" and that the use of Spanish dies out by the third generation, even in Southern California – a megalopolitan with the highest concentration of Spanish-speakers and persons of Mexican origin in the United States. Using U.S. Census data and national and Los Angeles opinion surveys, Citrin et al. (2007) found that Latinos acquire English and lose Spanish rapidly by the second generation. These studies refute Huntington's claims that Latin American immigrants are much less likely to speak English than earlier generations of European immigrants because they all speak a common language and are regionally concentrated and segregated within Spanish-speaking enclaves. Citrin et al. (2007:45) also found that Latinos were just as committed to work ethic when compared with native-born whites, refuting Huntington's argument that Latinos are less committed to the values of self-reliance and hard work.

Aside from their various definitions of American identity, scholars offer explanations as to why "the foreignness of outsiders has been used historically to define and shape the national community" (Honig 2001). Huntington (2004:24) argues that "To define themselves, people

need an other. Do they also need an enemy? Some people clearly do.” Erikson (1966:13) observes, “Deviant forms of behavior, by marking the outer edges of group life, give the inner structure its special character and thus supply the framework within which the people of the group develop an orderly sense of their own cultural identity....One of the surest ways to confirm an identity, for communities as well as for individuals, is to find some way of measuring what one is *not*.” The process of constructing immigrants and foreigners as others throughout history has, in part, defined what an American is *not*, allowing Americans to develop their own American identity.

The construction of immigrants and foreigners as others has been well documented. Calavita (2007:10) contends that “immigrant racialization has contributed to and been shaped by the ongoing racialization of American Americans and thus problematizes the concept of national identity.” Ngai (2004:7) asserts that immigration policies based on race and national origin have been used to systematically exclude groups of people from the full benefits of citizenship, including Chinese immigrants, who were grouped together with African Americans. Luibhéid (2002:64) explains that Japanese immigrants were excluded in the early 1920s based on fears that the Japanese intended to take over the United States through their fertility and reproduction, just as Mexican immigrants are today. One prominent figure in the anti-Japanese movement, V.S. McClatchy, argued that “no race within our borders can compare with the Japanese in rate of reproduction” and that by the year 2017 the Japanese population would double the white population of California” (Luibhéid 2002:65).

## Methods and Procedures

### Gaining Access

Gaining access to the UMP was a challenging part of the research process. In Fall 2008, one of Dr. Morgan's research assistants conducted an interview with Terry, chairman of the UMP, in connection with a class assignment, and gave Dr. Morgan a copy of the interview transcript. Later that year other research assistants attended a UMP meeting and took fieldnotes. Working with an interview transcript, a set of fieldnotes, and a handful of news articles, my job was to locate, contact and interview as many members as possible.<sup>1</sup>

I began by searching online for everything I could find on the Utah Minutemen. I came across the Utah Minuteman Project Yahoo Group and immediately sent a request to join the group. I also found an interview conducted by Accountability Utah with three Utahns who served as volunteers for the Minuteman Project on the U.S.-Mexico border (Accountability Utah 2005). I continued to search online for their contact information. After two weeks of searching, I found a lead for George, one of three Utahns featured in the Accountability Utah interview. I called the number listed asking for one of the Minutemen and was horrified to find out that I was speaking to the leader of their opposition group - Proyecto Latino de Utah. I apologized and asserted my pro-immigrant stance, and explained that I was doing research on the UMP. To my surprise he said he was good friends with George and gave me his phone number. When I called the number, however, it was no longer in service.

The next day, my request to join the Utah Minuteman Project Yahoo Group was accepted. I emailed the group administrator, introducing myself and requesting an interview. Three days later, Victor, the former chairman and co-founder of the UMP, responded and agreed

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<sup>1</sup> IRB approval was obtained for this research study. All names have been changed to protect the identities of the respondents. All interview data was stored online and password protected.

to be interviewed. We set up an interview that he rescheduled, and did not meet for an interview until six weeks after our first email exchange.

The weeks leading to the interview were filled with questions and doubts. I did not know how I would face the Minutemen, let alone remain neutral and unbiased. I worried about how the interviews would be affected if respondents knew my parents' immigration history or found out that I wasn't full white. Having been raised by my Vietnamese mother and Peruvian adoptive father, I identified more with immigrants and foreigners than with native-born Americans. I spent many hours mentally preparing for the interview, reminding myself again and again that I usually passed for white and there was no way they could find out about my family immigration history unless I told them – which I decided would not happen. I also resolved to keep political opinions to myself, have an open mind and display a sincere interest in learning about their organization and listening to their viewpoints on illegal immigration. After all, my goal was to tell *their* story.

On the day of the interview I was still anxious. I was worried that Victor would find out who I really was. However, I resolved to put forth my best American self for the interview by trying to appear and act as whites possible. Thankfully, I had my research partner with me. Standing at six-feet tall with blond hair and blue eyes, Keaton embodied all things American. I relied on Keaton to make up for any lack in my American self-identity.

Keaton and I arrived at the Midvale Mining Café early. We got a table and waited. Ten minutes passed and we saw Victor make his way toward us in the back corner of the empty restaurant. He looked like he had come straight from work. He wore faded, paint-stained jeans and an old t-shirt. He had messy brown hair that fell past his ears, dark brown eyes, and an olive

complexion. He greeted us with a gentle handshake and a friendly smile. His soft voice and mild demeanor quickly calmed my fears.

He quickly opened up to us, telling us details about his personal life and the events that led him to get involved with the Minutemen. I attentively listened – it was the first time that I had ever heard this side of immigration before. I was surprised to find that I did not disagree with what he was saying. As a Latino of Mexican descent, he came across as more moderate than I had expected. The way he seemed to empathize with the plight of young undocumented students, accepting them as Americans, led me to think that he was not anti-immigrant. He opened my eyes to a different aspect of immigration that I had never before considered and changed my perception of who the Minutemen were. Towards the end of the interview, he offered to email me the names and contact information of others involved in the movement. I followed up with him by email and phone a few days later but never heard back.

Since I had succeeded in contacting Victor, I made the assumption that we had achieved access to the UMP. Unfortunately, this was a mistake and I began my search again. I reached the research assistant who conducted the interview with the chairman of the UMP in 2008 to find out how he gained access to the group. He told me that he found the phone number on the UMP website. However, this website no longer existed for reasons that I would discover in the course of the fieldwork.

I decided to try a different approach as I was not finding anything. Instead of searching directly for the members of the UMP, I began searching for information about other local organizations affiliated with the UMP. The first organization that I contacted was UFIRE (Utahns For Immigration Reform and Enforcement). One of the UFIRE leaders graciously provided me with contact information for two members of the UMP – Terry and George. He also

told me about UCII (Utah Coalition on Illegal Immigration), the umbrella organization of the UMP, UFIRE and other pro-enforcement groups and helped me understand the organizational context of these groups and their inter-relationships. After our conversation, I immediately emailed Terry and George and requested interviews with them.

That same day, in a last desperate attempt, I tried searching Facebook for Kevin and Roger, the other two Utahns featured in the Accountability Utah interview. One of the three – Roger– had a Facebook profile. I also tried searching for Jim Gilchrist. To my surprise, he was also on Facebook. I sent them both Facebook messages introducing my research and requesting an interview.

Within an hour I received an email response from George, who expressed concern about the “slant of the paper.” I called him, introduced myself and explained the aims of the project and my desire to understand his perspectives on illegal immigration. He seemed very comfortable talking to me on the phone and we ended up talking about illegal immigration for over 45 minutes. Not only did our conversation give me insight into some of the important issues to the Minutemen, it was also a huge breakthrough in gaining access and building trust. During our talk he provided me with information about the whereabouts and date of the next UMP meeting – which was not available online. We also set up an interview for the following week.

During the time George and I were on the phone, I received an email from Terry. Roger had forwarded Terry the Facebook message that I sent him:

Hello Ma'am,

You sent an email to Roger Lee about the Utah Minuteman Project. Though you would not know it due to internal difficulties and our website not being finished, I am the Chairman of the UMP. Mr. Lee sent me your email. If you are truly interested in learning

about us and for what we stand, I would be more than willing to engage. You understand my suspicion of anyone from academia and their agenda.

Minutes later, I received an email from Roger:

What is the message you wish to convey via your efforts? Forgive me for being less than forthcoming, but I have gotten into this situation with others who had an agenda that I definitely did not agree with. So, what is your plan? Do you have an agenda? Where do you want these ideas and values to lead? Don't get me wrong, I am willing to discuss the issues surrounding illegal immigration and how it is impacting this country. There is little point for us to have a dialog unless you want to discover the truth of the issue. So, where do you want this to go?

That same week my research partner, Keaton, found contact information for Kevin, the last of the three Minutemen featured in the Accountability Utah interview. When Keaton called Kevin on the phone, he was also wary of our reasons for requesting an interview with him.

We had not anticipated being treated with so much suspicion, partly because Victor had never questioned our motives or intentions. Keaton and I met with Dr. Morgan to discuss how we could build trust and decided that it would be appropriate to let the members know that as researchers we were interested in presenting their viewpoints, not to pursue a particular agenda. I sent an email assuring Terry and Roger that our goal was “to objectively present the true values, opinions and perspectives of members of the Utah Minutemen in an accurate and unbiased way.” I also offered to present them with a draft of our paper once it was completed.

What really opened the door for us was our interview with George. It went very well, and the following day he sent an email to us and Terry sharing his positive interview experience and urging Terry to meet with us:

Michele and Keat,

It was a pleasure meeting with you yesterday and it was obvious you had given great thought to questions you felt needed to be answered. I will be forwarding this to Terry, with the hopes he will respect an interview with you as he has some great insights regarding the border and the future of our country.

Terry you will find these two Journalists from BYU refreshing after our past experiences with the mainstream media. I urge you to meet with them as I feel they are someone who truly does want to hear "OUR" side of the story.

George is a very well-respected member of the UMP and I am confident that George's recommendation was a significant factor in building trust for Terry and others whom we later met. Soon after George sent his email, I received this email from Terry:

I contacted members of my Board to see if they wanted to participate along with me and Dave Lopez, my co-Chair in your work. I am satisfied about your agenda and appreciate your forthright statement of your wishes. Even if you had an "agenda" I would still like to meet with you, or anyone, because there are so many misperceptions out there relative to who we are, what we stand for and what OUR agenda is.

We spoke on the phone later that day. I was taken aback by his warm and friendly demeanor on the phone. We scheduled the group interview and I mentioned our plans to attend the UMP meeting that week. He said he was pleased we were going to attend and he looked forward to meeting us there.

Attending the first UMP meeting was extremely important to gaining access to the group and recruiting respondents for our study. When we arrived to the meeting site, George was at the door. He warmly welcomed us to the meeting and introduced us to all the board members and

many others. Seeing our positive relationship with George, other members were willing to be interviewed. Aside from building trust, I discovered a Vietnamese connection with Terry that I was not expecting. On the way home from the meeting, Keaton and I talked about the experience:

M: When he [Terry] said his wife was from Saigon, I couldn't say nothing. I would feel like that would be...

K: I knew you would talk about it.

M: Well, he brought it up. And I felt like it would be like I was trying to hide something, which I'm not, because my mom, when I told her about the Minutemen Project, was all for it.

K: Really?

M: My mom is very American. She loves America. She didn't want to teach me Vietnamese because she didn't want me to be Vietnamese...so sharing that with them, I felt, just bonded us together. Because they were like, "Yeah, you're an American." Remember Eric said that? "That's 'cause you're an American!" (Fieldnotes, May 2010)

I never would have imagined that the Chairman of the UMP had lived in Vietnam, married a Vietnamese woman, and had mixed-race Vietnamese American children just like me. Although I had never intended to reveal my immigrant heritage or Vietnamese identity, it ended up becoming an unexpected point of access. Revealing part of my personal history enabled me to connect with Terry and others who heard me tell my mother's story.

### **Establishing Rapport**

Our position as university students worked both to our advantage and disadvantage. Coming from sociology and academia, both of which are notoriously liberal, respondents were

concerned that we had an “agenda.” However, the fact that we were students at Brigham Young University helped to soften those concerns as Brigham Young University is overwhelmingly Republican and socially conservative. The University’s reputation for high moral standards and our membership in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church) were also positive factors that allowed us to establish rapport based on shared values, as a significant number of the UMP were members of the Church (Mormons), or shared LDS values. Our age also played a role in building trust. Both in our early twenties, Keaton and I we were not as threatening as other more seasoned or older researchers and professors might have been. We were largely unaware of the issues and the respondents were happy to have an opportunity to educate us about their side of the story. Terry viewed our interest in the group as evidence that public perception on the pro-enforcement movement was shifting. In an interview he stated:

Things have shifted somewhat in the last four or five years in terms of public perception and that is that people aren't quite as willing as they used to be, and I believe you guys are evidence of that, to immediately jump on the diversity mongering bandwagon and look at people like us as just outright racist. People are becoming more and more skeptical of that view of the patriot movement and specifically the anti-illegal alien, anti-invasion movement.

At the end of another interview, Kevin asked us when we were going to join the movement:

So when are you two going to sign up to be Minutemen? [K: You know what’s funny, you’re the first person that has asked us that specific question.] And show up on the line, I need to see your faces there.

Our personal backgrounds also helped establish rapport. Keaton was able to establish a connection with many respondents who worked in construction because his dad is a brick mason.

My Irish-Scottish ethnicity helped build rapport, and several respondents specifically mentioned my maiden name (O'Neill) and felt a common bond because of our Irish ancestry. With several other respondents, my Vietnamese ethnicity and identity as a child of a legal immigrant helped to establish rapport. One respondent referred to my mother as an illustration of the ideal immigrant. With two Latino respondents, revealing my Peruvian family background helped establish rapport.

### **Methodological Approach**

This study uses a qualitative, grounded theory approach in conducting in-depth interviews with respondents and examining and interpreting primary documents, newspaper articles, and other media sources. I began by examining existing data on the Utah Minutemen to create an initial interview guide. In-depth interviews were casual and semi-structured, focused on understanding undocumented immigration from their perspectives. Using Corbin and Strauss (2008) and Lofland et al. (2005) as a model, interview questions were modified to incorporate new themes and concepts that emerged from the interviews. The focus of this study is to tell the story of the Utah Minutemen from the perspectives of the members themselves.

### **Data Collection**

This qualitative study incorporates a range of data sources: in-depth interviews, fieldnotes and primary documents. Our review of relevant primary documents included the Utah Minuteman Project's (UMP) mission statement, minutes from meetings, and media coverage of UMP events.

We interviewed a total of 24 individuals. We conducted 15 interview sessions: 8 individual interviews, 6 pair interviews, and one group session with 5 respondents. They included members of the UMP and their spouses or partners; Roger Lee, one of the Utah

volunteers for the Minuteman Project featured in the Accountability Utah interview; Ron Mortensen, spokesperson of the UCII; and Jim Gilchrist, founder of the Minuteman Project.

Aside from the initial contact I made through the UMP Yahoo Group, Facebook and internet searches, the majority of our respondents were recruited at the first UMP meeting we attended. After that meeting, Keaton and I divided up the room and collected contact information from everyone willing to participate. Of the 11 people we contacted at the meeting, one did not return our phone calls and another no longer wanted to participate. At the second UMP meeting we recruited two additional respondents. We also obtained contact information for two respondents by referral from Terry Seymour.

We conducted the interviews in respondents' homes or workplaces, restaurants, libraries, or similar public places of the respondents' choosing. Interview sessions lasted between one and three hours. Each interview was digitally recorded with the verbal consent of the respondent. We transcribed each interview verbatim and presented the respondent with a copy of the transcript, allowing the respondent to make corrections.

Eleven of the fifteen interview sessions I conducted with research partner Keaton. Two interview sessions I conducted with my partner, Matthew. Two interview sessions I conducted alone – one in person and one on the phone. Interview questions were modified to include new concepts and themes that arose during the interviews.

The majority of respondents were native-born whites, Christians, middle-aged, had some college education. Six respondents identified as Latino; eight respondents were second, third or fourth generation children of immigrants; and two respondents were first generation immigrants. See Table 1 below for more details about the demographics of our final interview sample.

(Table 1 Here)

## Data Analysis

After the interviews were transcribed, they were organized following the grounded theory method outlined by Corbin and Strauss (2008) and Lofland et al. (2005). I began with line-by-line *open coding* of the first interview using NVivo, a qualitative software program. Specifically, I inspected my interview transcripts and fieldnotes line by line, condensing and organizing my data into categories in terms of “relevant interests, commitments ... and perspectives” (Lofland et al. 2005:201). This process yielded more than 40 concepts or codes. For the second interview, I began *focused coding*, which is less open-ended and more conceptual than *open coding* (Lofland et al. 2005:201). During this stage, I compared the concepts in the second interview to those in the first interview and looking for new concepts that might not have been present in the first. I examined the relationships between concepts, elaborating, modifying or discarding concepts as I analyzed additional data (Corbin & Strauss 2008:199) and identified a number of the “more analytically interesting initial codes to knit together larger chunks of data ... as the basis for asking more focused an analytic questions” (Lofland et al. 2005:201).

I followed this process of *open* and *focused coding* for the remainder of the interviews. I then created a diagram (see Figure 1) to illustrate the relationships between concepts (Corbin & Strauss 2008:117).

(Figure 1 Here)

In my analysis I found that the data could be understood in terms of two main concepts: illegal immigration and American identity. Within the category of illegal immigration, the data could be group into three broad categories: causes, facilitators, and consequences of illegal immigration. Respondents view illegal immigration as the most significant threat to American identity. The most significant and interesting discovery during my analysis was not illegal immigration in itself, but how the members of the UMP construct American identity. Of the total

number of references coded, 62 percent of all references related to American identity while only 38 percent related to illegal immigration (see Figure 2). Rather than focusing on the causes, facilitators or consequences of illegal immigration, I chose to focus my study on the construction of American identity.

(Figure 2 Here)

After identifying American identity as a central core category, I *open coded* all data coded as American identity. In this process, I found that the concepts surrounding American identity could be understood in terms of four main categories: assimilation, respect for law, work ethic, and patriotism (see Figure 3). Although each sub-code had a relatively equal number of references, the sub-code of assimilation has the most coverage with 18 respondents.

(Figure 3 Here)

### **The Minuteman Project**

*There's something in me that made me do this, this Minuteman Project thing, and it was a combination of my loyalty to God, country, community, family...and using free speech as the weapon of choice rather than powder horns and muskets it was going to create a different kind of minuteman, bloodless revolution and it called national awareness ... so that's what I did, I created the largest Minuteman assembly and Minutewoman assembly since the Revolutionary War.*

(Jim Gilchrist, interview, June 19, 2010)

I interviewed Jim Gilchrist, founder of the Minuteman Project, on a sunny summer morning in Irvine, California. After spending weeks pouring over his book, *Minutemen: The Battle to Secure America's Borders*, I carefully prepared three pages of interview questions. I

was terrified. I did not expect that my Facebook message would result in an in-person interview with the leader of one of the most visible anti-illegal immigrant movements in the country.

We planned to meet Gilchrist at Starbucks. My partner and I arrived early. While he went to order drinks I scouted out a quiet location outside. As I awaited Gilchrist's arrival, a picture of him I had seen popped into my mind. In the picture he is wearing a sleeveless khaki cargo vest, his bare arms are exposed and folded, a walkie-talkie is strapped to his army-green backpack, and he is clutching a video camera, meant to document any illegal activity along the border. His stern no-nonsense expression and clothing demonstrate his ability and preparedness to fight the "alien invasion."

A few minutes later Gilchrist arrived. I immediately recognized him and waved. Standing under five feet eight inches, his appearance was much less threatening than I had imagined. He smiled as he approached our table. We shook hands and sat down. He leaned back in his chair, and we began to talk about his life history. When I asked him about his career he told me that he worked as an accountant for over 20 years and joked, "Now I'm still a CPA, but a different kind – a Certified Public Annoyance."

When I asked him about the events in his life that motivated him to start the Minuteman Project, he cited military service as the single most important factor in his decision to start the Minuteman Project. He also told me about one of the first times he started to notice that illegal immigration was a problem. In 1989 he tried to apply for an HUD subsidy for his mother but found out that all the funds had been already distributed to illegal immigrants.

She was impoverished, living on 637 dollars a month social security... I went to San Bernardino County where she lived and I said, "I read about this program in the newspaper. You will pay fifty percent to seventy percent of my mom's rent. She's in her

seventies...she's elderly and disabled. I want to get her qualified for this program .... And the lady said, "The fund is closed." I said, "Well, why?" And she said, "There's no money left." And I said, "Come on, you got 200 million dollars, you went through it in 18 months or two years? ... And the lady said, "Well, all the illegal aliens have plundered the fund and there's no money left." And she was kind of irate about it as if America had been burned here, somebody had been swindled and cheated ... the more I thought about it, the more concerned I got about it, the more I felt cheated by the system.

In was not until 2004 that Gilchrist first learned about the border enforcement movement on the George Putnam radio show. When he heard about Chris Simcox, "the warrior on the border," who ran weekend observation activities at the border, he called Simcox to get involved. After initially agreeing to join Simcox at the border, Gilchrist called back with a plan for the Minuteman Project:

Chris, I got a different idea. I'm coming to Arizona, and I'm going to ask for volunteers from all 50 states including Alaska and Hawaii, Maine and Florida to join me. And I want to hook up with you, ally with you. I want to call it 'The Minuteman Project' and it will be in conjunction with Homeland Civil Defense Corps ... I'm going to make the target date, t-day is going to be 1 April 2005.

Gilchrist recalls, "We both ended up our conversation laughing, saying that, 'Yeah, we'll be lucky if we get five people to show up.' And I says, 'Well I'm coming for thirty days if I got to stay there by myself in a tent on that border.'"

## **Recruitment**

The day after he spoke with Simcox on the phone Gilchrist began recruiting volunteers for a 30-day operation to "protect our country from a 40-year-long invasion across our southern

border with Mexico” (Frosty Wooldridge 2011). His recruiting efforts began on a small-scale grassroots level, initially reaching out only to friends and family. He told me that he sent out an email to 24 people, including two of his brothers. He recalled, “In one week, it got into 400,000 email inboxes. Everybody forwarded it.” The use of email and the internet enabled him to spread his message quickly and to a national audience. Gilchrist’s background in journalism was an asset to his recruiting campaign, enabling him to provide clear and organized information for potential volunteers and create all recruiting and marketing materials himself.

In the recruitment poster, the objectives and goals of the Minuteman Project were clearly stated: to block illegal immigrants from entering the United States and to attract media and political attention. Gilchrist hoped that by attracting attention he could demonstrate that “21st century minutemen/women have to help secure US borders because the US government REFUSES to provide our dutiful U.S. Border Patrol and Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) with the manpower and funding required to do so” (Frosty Wooldridge 2011).

He made a clear statement in the recruiting poster that all volunteers would be responsible for their own costs, which he estimated for 30 days of service to be around \$3,500. Interested volunteers were asked to write a statement about why they wanted to participate in the project and an account of any similar experiences related to the mission of The Minuteman Project. They were also asked to provide a brief personal history, including their profession, military background (if any), and outdoors or outback experience. In addition, volunteers were asked about foreign language abilities, and racial/ethnic background. Legal immigrants were asked to provide their country of origin and year of immigration to the United States. A final note in the recruiting poster announced that all participants were welcome, “regardless of gender,

race, color, creed, age, or physical disability.” The poster especially encouraged those with military, law enforcement or “intelligence gathering experience” to participate (Frosty Wooldridge 2011).

### **Minutemen on the Border**

*You had the Geriatric Brigade 'cause they were the people with free time, out there with their binoculars and their ice buckets and their lawn chairs and they shut down the border!*

(Terry, Interview, May 31, 2010)

On April 1, 2005 volunteers from across the country gathered at the Minuteman Project base in Cochise County, Arizona. The Minutemen succeeded in garnering significant media attention –the reporters almost outnumbered the volunteers. Gilchrist recalls that “it was too much, too fast”:

I was overwhelmed, and we just on a dream and a prayer went down to Arizona six months later with 1250 volunteers. 450 showed up the first day .... So the media did exactly what I wanted them to do but beyond my wildest dreams. I never thought I’d get this kind of media following. But it is an issue that I literally struck the mother lode of patriotism or the nerve center of what was bothering people.

There were a total of 880 volunteers from all 50 states (Gilchrist & Corsi 2006). While the majority were from Arizona and California, six Utahns answered Gilchrist’s call to defend the border. A few of these had already participated in a volunteer border patrol in October 2004, including Roger, who drove his RV down to the border and spent several months helping Gilchrist and Simcox with their preparations for the April 2005 Minuteman Project. While volunteers were invited to spend 30 days on the border, they could choose to stay for as long or as little as they liked. George described his reason for going down to border:

And the reason why we did is we were told about what's happening to our border and that it's out of control. Nobody knew anything about it at this time .... and so Kevin and I says, 'You know, let's go down and do it, it's our duty to protect our country, protect our borders.'

George wanted to go to the border because he felt it was his duty. The border was "out of control." Kevin, another volunteer from Utah who traveled with George said, "Well, George and I ... decided we wanted to go down and see for ourselves what's going on at the border ... just to see what was really going on and what was happening." Neither George nor Kevin knew much about the situation there, but were so concerned by what they had heard that they felt that they needed to check it out for themselves. Anne, a Minutewoman volunteer from Utah, was motivated to volunteer because of the shift in attitudes of undocumented immigrants in Utah: "Suddenly I was hearing people say, 'We deserve this. This is our right' or whatever and I thought that's not right." She and her husband, Tom, joined the movement to "call attention to what's going on."

Accounts of the experiences of the Minutemen on the border vary widely from person to person and even within a given interview. George described his time on the border in an almost humorous fashion:

So we sat down there, nice comfortable lawn chair, bucket of Colonel Kentucky beside us, big coke and glasses. Just watched the border and every once in a while when go back to our car and beep beep beep we'd blow the horn, turn our lights on and off, "We're here! Better go somewhere else; you're not going to come through here!" And that's all we did.

When I first asked Anne about her about her experience on the border her description was fairly benign:

We didn't see a lot but we saw a lot of evidence, things they had left lying around when they had come across: their backpacks, their bottles ... gallon jugs, and all kinds of junk.

Later in the same interview, she portrayed her experience on the border as dangerous and even life-threatening:

The last time we went down there, I saw some people all dressed in black, like ninja warriors, getting ready to come across .... they were flitting around a big rock out there that they were hiding behind. So I informed our leader there, and he was going to tell the sheriff so that they would be watching that area that night .... When I saw that ninja warrior I was all alone. We're not supposed to do that. And they told me. But I said, "I thought if he shot me it would cause some note-worthy incident." And they said, "They would just drag you over the border and dismember you. You'd never know. That's what they do."

Several other Minutemen shared experiences similar to Anne's, highlighting the danger and crime they associate with the border and illegal immigration. Victor, another Minuteman volunteer from Utah, said:

But then at night like I've seen guys dressed up, one night we saw about 25 guys dressed up in black military uniforms with backpacks on. And they just came marching right down this road, you know pitch black with no lights on. But walking silently, right past us, because we're hiding in the bushes and it's dirty and it's nasty. And I'm wondering why am I doing this?! And then they come walking by, guns and everything. [Q: With

guns?] Yeah AK's right over the fence, marched right on to the town down the road then they get off the road and then we're on the phone calling the border patrol.

Aside from their near-encounters with the drug cartels and "ninja warriors," many of the Minutemen related stories about having their lives threatened by the MS-13, a transnational criminal gang composed primarily of Central Americans, who they said had offered a \$20,000 reward to anyone who killed a Minuteman (The Washington Times 2005). Nancy shares a frightening experience she and her husband, Jack, had:

When we were down at the border, Jack was walking along the other side of the fence and this other guy came driving up, the other Minuteman came driving up and said, "You get back unless you're carrying! There's a \$20,000 something or other on your head. And they'll grab you and they'll take you. You get back from there unless you have a gun.

In addition to their patrols on the border, some Minutemen got to know some of the farmers and ranchers living near the border. George and Kevin shared stories about the plight of families who had been directly affected by migrants trespassing on their property:

The one family I was more attached to had three little blonde girls...and they says, "Whenever we're around we never take our gun off. We're always carrying a gun around the house" ... and it's not uncommon for there to be 100 to 150 people waiting in their yard for nighttime to move on into the area. [Q: Why don't they call the border patrol?] Border patrol knows it but they don't protect them. They just have to live, it's a war zone. I'm telling you that whole border is just a war zone.

The above passage draws attention to the crime and lawlessness along the border that affects the American citizens living there. Kevin learned that the situation for the locals is getting worse,

highlighting that the migrants crossing the border today are more demanding and violent than they used to be:

Ten years ago, it was a different crowd. They didn't have people breaking into their houses, people threatening them ... Because these people are coming onto their property with drugs, stealing things, just being blatant, being in their face, demanding things from them, they say they never can get a good night's sleep because somebody's always harassing them, or breaking in, or killing their dogs ....

Victor also shared a story about something he witnessed while on the border that showed him that Americans are not the only victims. It reveals the desperation of many migrants and their willingness to go to extreme lengths to get into the United States

And the one thing that broke my heart ... I saw a mother throw her baby on the desert floor to get away from the border patrol. It was in the binoculars, we were on the hill and here comes a whole swat a whole bunch of people .... hundreds, they'll just get a couple of blocks back and run through the gates when the cars are coming through .... So they all most of them get through and get away. But that one, that broke my heart because I saw that in the binoculars .... That she just threw her baby on the ground and took off and she got away, because the border patrol was chasing them and they stopped to, you know, give aid to the baby, picked him up and called an ambulance and have them come check him out. Like anything you would do as Americans. So you know there's a lot more to this than just than just that hard working guy that wants a job and a better life.

While at the border, these Utah volunteers were inspired to do something about illegal immigration in their own state. Their experiences created the impetus to organize the anti-illegal

immigration movement in Utah. Such stories, retold in UMP meetings, continue to be important symbols that motivate the Minutemen. George recalled:

Well we talked ... and we remembered that we have quite a few illegals ... in our own area and it was just starting to make a difference. And so we said, “Well you know we’re Minutemen .... so we need to go back to our own state after we leave here and then start at the root level and start taking control of our own city and our county and our state, making them aware of what has been going on.

### **The Utah Minuteman Project**

Upon their return the Minutemen volunteers came together with other Utah citizens and other groups to form the Utah Minuteman Project. Anne explained that their purpose was to “organize and help to get people aware of what was going on.” In the beginning, membership in the UMP was fluid and informal. There was no official record of membership or collection of dues. Roger said, “We just kicked around ideas and thoughts and how to deal with some of these issues and what needed to be done and we kind of just kept gnawing away at the corners of the problems we saw.”

Members of the newly formed Utah Minutemen Project returned to the border together several more times. After their third trip, however, their focus began to change. Anne explained that after their third trip to the border, they became “more concentrated on what to do here in Utah ... and try to get some help with enforcing the laws here in Utah” because they felt like they “weren’t doing too much on the border anymore.”

Although border patrol trips became less frequent as the UMP continued to grow, the border remained an important symbol to them. The experiences that the founding members had along the border continued to motivate and inspire. After the border patrols began to fade, the

UMP became involved in demonstrations, marches, and protests. In recent years, the UMP has shifted its focus from the public demonstrations to political lobbying and supporting the passage of strict enforcement immigration bills or the repeal of pro-immigrant legislation. It seeks to accomplish this by staying vocal in the media; issuing press releases and statements; appearing in interviews, debates, and forums; and by combining their efforts with other like-minded organizations. In addition, the UMP encourages its members to become actively engaged in local and state politics. Several UMP members hold county or state delegate positions (fieldnotes, July 22, 2010).

### **Recruitment**

The UMP does not actively recruit members; the majority of respondents self-recruited into the movement. As previously mentioned, several of the respondents were already members of another conservative social organization when they joined the UMP. Other members were not involved in any organizations and were looking for a group to join to fight against illegal immigration.

Some members were motivated to join the movement by a specific event, but many others said that it was a series of events and changes over time that led them to join the UMP. Many members first heard about the UMP on conservative talk radio. Mary, who had never been involved in any social organization, joined the UMP after hearing Victor speak on k-talk radio. Doug Miller had never been involved in politics, but after witnessing the March 2006 immigration protests, he wanted to organize a counter-protest. He immediately joined the UMP when he heard they were already staging a march.

## Membership

According to the UMP organizational by-laws, in order to become a voting member of the UMP, you must be a U.S. citizen, fill out an official application that is approved by the governing Board of Directors and pay annual dues. The by- outline another category of membership, “honorary.” This allows political candidates, current or former office holders, or other citizens to become “honorary members” by a majority vote of the Board of Directors and the general membership (Utah Minuteman Project 2010). Aside from voting and honorary members, there are many others who regularly attend meetings and are still considered part of the membership of the UMP.

In the course of fieldwork, I discovered that membership is loose and informal and that the distinction of “voting member” does not determine one’s involvement in or commitment to the group. Some members said that in regular circumstances they would be voting members, but they were currently unable to afford the membership dues. As of July 19, 2010, there were 26 dues-paying members (Davidson 2010). An average of 15 to 20 people attend UMP meetings, but there are an additional 100-150 people on the UMP email list (interviews with George and Terry).

When the UMP was first organized, one of the requirements for board membership was a yearly trip to the U.S.-Mexico border. This requirement was replaced with the requirement to read *The Forgotten Immigrant* by Rep. Chris Herrod, a change voted on at a UMP meeting we attended during the course of the study (fieldnotes, July 22, 2010). This change reflects the new priorities of the UMP, moving the focus away from the border and toward legislative activism.

## Findings

I have divided the findings section into two sections. In the first section I introduce the concept of American identity and how it is officially defined by the UMP. In the second section I discuss American identity and how members of the UMP have redefined American identity based on four main concepts: assimilation, respect for law, work ethic, and patriotism.

### **American Identity Defined**

*If it were only about jobs, the Utah Minuteman Project wouldn't exist. If it were only about the rule of law, the Utah Minuteman Project wouldn't exist. If it were only about equality before the law the Utah Minuteman Project wouldn't exist. If it were only about English, the Utah Minuteman Project wouldn't exist. But the thing that I hear most often from people, everywhere I go, on this particular issue is, "I want my country back! I want my kids to grow up to be American!" And this is the consequence of the erosion of our national identity and the ... neglect of America ...*

(Terry, Interview, May 31, 2010)

American identity is a central motivating theme within the Utah Minuteman Project. It is the core of all issues related to illegal immigration. In the view of the UMP, illegal immigration is a problem because it undermines American identity. On the other hand, legal immigration supports American identity. What is American identity? What does it mean to be an American? The Utah Minuteman Project answers these questions on its website (Utah Minuteman Project 2010b):

Our identity as one Nation under God is defined by our history, founding principles and our institutions:

Allegiance to the Constitution and the Rule of Law

Devotion to Equality under that Law

Our Judeo-Christian Heritage

Our English language

Tolerance

These are the ties that bind...and set us apart from the rest of the world. These are why we Minutemen stand against the Fourth World Invasion of our country. Illegal migration, especially from Mexico, directly undermines and threatens what has historically bound us together and what defines us as Americans today.

In this statement, the UMP asserts that what makes America distinct from other nations is its history, founding principles, and institutions. Although this is how the UMP officially defines what it means to be an American, my findings from in-depth interviews with members suggest that American identity is more complex and nuanced than the definition outlined above.

### **American Identity Redefined**

While the five pillars outlined above are important elements of American identity, my findings suggest that other aspects of American identity—assimilation, patriotism, self-sufficiency and rule of law—are more important.

#### **Assimilation**

For the members of the UMP, assimilation is *the* process by which immigrants become American. Immigrants who do not assimilate are not American, regardless of citizenship status. Members of the UMP argue that unlike early European immigrants who learned English and adopted the American culture, immigrants today do not want to assimilate. On the contrary, say UMP members, illegal immigrants wish to “promote their culture” (interview with Licia). The UMP interviews pointed to ethnic enclaves and unwillingness to learn and speak English as examples of the fulfillment of Reconquista theory that Mexicans are taking over the United

States. Based on my findings, to assimilate is to embrace and fit into the American culture, not to promote another culture. Respondents contend that ethnic enclaves and hyphenated Americans who cannot speak English are threatening the American melting pot and American identity.

David, a second-generation Mexican American, shared his definition of assimilation:

Assimilating means—well, up in this particular nation—being a part of that. So it's to embrace the culture. It's to embrace the language and share your culture and your language that's your background with other people if you're able to.

David's response suggests that assimilating is an attitude of gladly receiving the American culture. It also suggests that assimilation is a practice of sharing one's culture and language. It is a reciprocal, not a one-sided process. Many respondents indicated that immigrants today are not gladly receiving the American culture and are more concerned with preserving their own cultures.

Members of the UMP view assimilation through the melting pot metaphor. They argue that illegal immigration is threatening the melting pot because the overwhelming majority of illegal immigrants are Mexican, disturbing the balance of immigrants. Joe, a second-generation Puerto Rican Italian American said:

[T]he melting pot that was of different nationalities that we used to experience has changed dramatically with illegal immigration .... It's not equal. We don't have a nice variety of Polish people or Italian people or German people or Bosnian, Haitians, Cubans ... the Mexicans are overrunning all the country, New Jersey, Cape Cod, all the way down to Florida, you know, Texas, even in Washington and Oregon .... Our culture is already being affected. [Q: How so?] Just going right back to what we said, like, it's being over populated ... by the Mexicans .... They're at seventy percent and everybody

else is at like thirty percent, statistically. So there you go ... That ruins the culture. Infested, it's infested and it's crazy.

To Joe, when one group is the majority, the “nice variety” that characterizes the American melting pot is lost and the culture becomes “infested.”

Anne, a second-generation German American, also argued that illegal immigration is not conducive to assimilation:

The reason we have a system of legal immigrants is that so we can assimilate them gradually. We've been invaded, essentially, with the way it is now because they've come in such numbers that they don't have to assimilate because they've got their own group that they can be with.

Anne asserts that immigration must be controlled, in order to be able to properly assimilate immigrants into American culture and society. She sees illegal immigration as an invasion because they do not go through the legal immigration system which is intended to help immigrants to assimilate. She also argues that size of the illegal immigrant community sustains ethnic enclaves in which immigrants are isolated and do not have to assimilate.

*Ethnic Enclaves.* The most visible representation of foreign cultures is in ethnic enclaves, concentrations of immigrants who have come together based on their shared language or culture. Several respondents expressed concern about Latino enclaves spreading across Utah. Victor, a third-generation Mexican American, described the predominantly Latino communities in California, and now in Utah:

Well they've managed to do that in California ... and like Miami and those areas it's totally Spanish! I mean you think you're in a Latin American country in some of these areas .... you know, showing off their culture. You drive down a whole corridor of the

Redwood Road corridor ... you've got the Valley Fair Mall that's really becoming Latino. Like where do you draw the line? Do we want Salt Lake to become a Tijuana?

As illustrated in the passage above, members of the UMP view ethnic enclaves as a stage where proud immigrants “show off” and “promote” their culture, suggesting an attitude of cultural superiority or dominance. Victor also expresses fear that the influence of ethnic enclaves will result in American cities resembling Mexico.

Many respondents did not understand why immigrants coming from developing countries would want to reproduce their cultures in America. Roger said:

And when they get here, what do they want to do? Set up their own culture. Their corrupted culture – that has failed them. “Well, by golly, I'm here so you ought to learn Spanish!” I don't think so. It baffles me why people run from these third world countries and when they get here they set up Little China or West Valley and you know want to speak their own language and want to bring their own cockfights and dog fights and whatever they were doing in their country. They're coming here to support their own country.

Roger suggests that “third world” cultural practices do not have place in the United States, and that setting up “their own culture” does not support the United States. When I asked him what makes up our American culture and identity, he explained that ethnic cultural practices in themselves do not threaten American identity, but it is not supporting this country that is “destructive”:

I am not against a parade down my street called Mardi Gras or whatever the various ethnic parades are. I'm not against those. Great. Go for it. Go have your Taiwanese meal and go have your fancy dances and support your Cherokee heritage. That's fine. No

argument. But we can't create a little Cherokee nation and isolate them from the rest of the country. That's destructive. [Q: Why?] Because we have to stand together. We have to stand shoulder to shoulder. We have to support this country, not some little division thereof .... people that come should come based on several criteria and assimilation into our culture should be one of those. We should not have a Little Tijuana. We just shouldn't have it.

Thus, Roger frames ethnic enclaves as something that isolates immigrants from the rest of the country. He sees such enclaves leading to division and not facilitating assimilation. He argues that when retaining one's native cultural practices is isolating, it is an attack on America itself.

*Hyphenated Americans.* Within the UMP, there is a strong emphasis on the importance of a singular national identity – the American identity. Members expect that people who immigrate to the United States identify only as an American, dropping any other ethnic or national identity.

The following statements illustrate the sentiments surrounding American self-identity:

You're not Latino, you're not Spanish, you're not Portuguese, you're an American. You're an American first and foremost above everything no matter where you came from. You're American. That's what I stand for. (George)

I don't like hyphenated Americans ... We're Americans, we don't need the hyphen! ... I'm not a German American because my grandfather came from Stuttgart, no! I'm an American! Red, white and blue and all that business ... and that's just the way it is. (Frank)

My son isn't a hyphenated American. He's not a Vietnamese American, he's an American. And by God that's how he's going to grow up. (Terry)

There's nothing I hate more than Mexican American .... its America. Period. ... The hyphenated American stuff is ridiculous. And that's what I mean by assimilation. (Doug)

It is clear from the statements above that for the Utah Minutemen, being an American means that immigrants must embrace an American self-identity and no other.

*The English Language.* When asked to define what it means to be an American, every respondent mentioned speaking English. Speaking English is the essence of being an American. Many respondents associated speaking a foreign language with illegality and being un-American. Mary, whose parents immigrated to the United States from Spain, said, "...they're talking in Spanish, you know they're illegals. [Q: How come?] Because Americans, you know – Hispanics – don't talk in Spanish. My family doesn't." When I asked Kevin why it is important for immigrants to learn English he responded:

Because that's what we are. We're an English-speaking nation. I mean ...It's always been a requirement under the legal side of immigration. That's how you assimilate. That's how you learn our culture. If you're going to be an American, be an American. English is part of our culture.

Tom also shares the idea that English is part of American identity, and expressed his concern about Spanish immersion programs and their effect on the formation of national identity:

I feel bad about our children...to have the children to go to school for a half-day and learn English and the other half the day to learn Spanish. Now that's terrible to me .... These children are learning Spanglish, they don't know who they are!

Many members of the UMP are not opposed to foreign languages as long as English remains the only official language. Several respondents speak a foreign language and have even taught their

children a second language. Licia and Doug decided to teach their children Spanish. Doug explained:

I said my kids when they first came out, they got to learn Spanish .... Because the thing is I mean the more you know the better off you are .... I mean if they could learn twenty languages that would be the coolest thing.

Respondents shared stories about their parents, grandparents or spouses who immigrated to the United States and pointed out that these immigrants learned English so that they could integrate into American society. They contrast these examples with immigrants today, both legal and illegal, who do not make the effort to learn English or do not want to speak English. Joe told me:

I would much rather spend my time trying to talk to someone that was trying to learn English and I would take time out of my day to sit and try to understand them, you know, and try to work with them, but they don't want to ...

Eric thinks that not only do today's immigrants not want to learn English, but they expect other people to learn Spanish:

The ignorance here is, "I'm here illegal, but you're going to learn my language." I quit learning it; I just got the point where I'm not even going to speak it anymore. I'm tired of it.

Several respondents said that having signs or materials printed in Spanish suggests that Spanish-speaking immigrants do not need to learn English. They say that this is wrong, favoring one immigrant group over another. They argue that all other immigrants who do not speak Spanish have to learn English and so should the Latinos.

[Y]ou walk into any store now and the signs are half Spanish and half English. Where's all of the forcing them to learn English if they're going to be here? There's not signs for

Japanese and for Chinese and Vietnamese ... there's a lot of those wonderful people in our country too and they have to learn English. (Patty)

Well, they're being favored, the people that speak Spanish. That bothers me. When some of them come here, they should make that a goal to speak English. Now, my wife's parents came from Germany. And they didn't demand that everything be in German. But now today, they can demand anything! (Tom)

Other members of the UMP view the use of a foreign language in the United States as an attack on the linguistic supremacy of English, and therefore an assault on the dominance of American culture in the United States. Tom said:

If we lose our language we've lost everything. And we're losing it now. You go over to Sears ... or out to the Intermountain Health Care and you know what they have up there? Signs in Spanish. When you pick up a phone and the operator says, "Spanish or English?" And that I resent deeply. In our own country, that I have to ... that I've lost my language. We have lost it to the Spanish-speaking people. We've literally lost.

Mary claims that the use of the Spanish language is evidence of Mexican Reconquista:

But have you noticed that when you go into places it's Spanish/English. And then when you're talking on the phone, "Press one for English, 2 for Spanish". We shouldn't have to be doing that. [Q: How come?] This is America. They're over here trying to take our country back.

Jim Gilchrist, founder of the MMP, echoes these sentiments, illustrating that this issue extends far beyond Utah. It is a widespread theme throughout the anti-illegal immigrant movement nationally. Gilchrist views language as the means by which Hispanic illegal immigrants will take over the Southwestern United States:

If we balkanize and we start having the southwest part of the United States predominately speaking Spanish ... Hispanic illegal aliens from Central America, South America, and Mexico will have literally taken their transferred, their culture, and their nation into the United States and have literally seized our infrastructure by doing so.

*Sociocultural Norms.* Members of the UMP identify certain cultural practices and behaviors of illegal immigrants and sometimes legal immigrants that they define as unacceptable and not accordance with the way that Americans do things. Some examples of these practices include selling food out of your car, parking your car on the lawn, letting your dog run loose, not having respect for property or privacy, not keeping your kids under control at the store, etc. It is important to note that these practices are not necessarily against the law or immoral; they only violate social norms. Mary told me:

My sister, Lori, she hates to see an illegal. She says, “They’re all over! They don’t have respect” And she likes going to second hand stores—she collects old things ... and then she says, “God, there they are in the DI [a second-hand store] and they’re stinking loud and their kids are running around. They don’t even take care of their kids. And they’re getting the toys out and jumping on the couches.” One day I told a little boy that was jumping on the couch to get off the couch. And the mom just looked at me. She didn’t even say nothing to me. ... They’re rude. Have you been around them? They cut right in front of you. I was in Wendy’s one time and there comes this lady. She gets right in front of me! I go, “Excuse me, I was here first” and she just looked at me. And my sister had that happen to her too, in Target. I guess because in Mexico they don’t teach you no lessons, you know? ... They go in the store, when you go in the store they’re in there talking on their cell phone as loud as they can. They don’t care about nobody.

Stories like these construct illegal immigrants, Latinos and other immigrants, as coarse and unrefined, defining what an American is not. They illustrate that learning and respecting American social norms are important aspects of assimilation.

### **Respect for Law**

The rule of law is more than just a way to protect sovereignty, stability, and equality, it is what defines the United States and sets it apart from other countries. It is what separates a civilized, ordered society from an anarchic one. It is what gives meaning to citizenship and is something worth fighting for. When I asked Mary what it means to be an American she responded, “First of all, they have to obey the laws.” For Mary, obeying the law is the first requirement of being an American. When I asked Roger why the law is so important to him and what it represents to him he responded:

It is rules that we need to play by. It is what defines this country as a country. My citizenship here is worth fighting for and when we choose to ignore the law then what am I really fighting for? What’s the point? Just say to hell with it. Where would we be? We’d be in a state of anarchy. Is that what we want? I don’t think so.

Roger sees the rule of law as what defines America as a nation and argues that without respect for law, there would be anarchy. Respondents believe that in our society today, there is no respect for rule of law, even from government leaders and politicians. Some respondents think that illegal immigrants do not have to answer to the law and get away with committing crimes that American citizens cannot get away with, undermining equality before the law. Kevin said:

When people can come and break the law on a daily basis, but we have to toe the line and if we get out of line, then we’re immediately in jail or facing some sort of consequence, where all they have to do is say, ‘Well I’m an illegal,’ and they’re let go. It’s ridiculous.

[Q: What does rule of law mean?] It means honoring, obeying, and sustaining the law as it's written. And abiding by it. And that's one of the problems we've got is you've got individuals that are here that can't abide by it because they're not here legally. But you have people here also that are legal that are not abiding by the law by hiring these people, by looking the other way .... And they're committing a felony too by hiring them. Now what's the difference? How can you teach people proper respect for law when these people that are supposedly upstanding people in the community are disobeying the law? You can't. And that's the problem with our culture here, with what's going on here. And that's the problem with illegal immigration.

As illustrated in the quotation above, Kevin sees illegal immigrants as bad examples to other Americans because they demonstrate, through their illegality, that respect for law is not important.

Legal status is the boundary of American identity. Eric explained that "Illegal immigration changes 100%. If they're here illegally, they're not Americans ...." In the view of the UMP, illegal immigrants are constantly in violation of the rule of law once they have entered the United States without legal authorization. Because illegal immigrants must have a social security number in order to work in the formal economy and identity theft is a felony, many members of the UMP think that illegal immigrants are criminals. To them, illegal immigration is not just a one-time offense; it is an ongoing chain of unlawful activity that does not just involve illegal immigrants, but all those who employ them. Anne said:

I thought, "They're breaking the rule of law." And we support the rule of law. That's my big focus. We need to continue to have a good support for the rule of law in this country, or it's going to just break down. It is breaking down the sovereignty of our country. ...

Well, if you feel like you don't need to obey the law, then what are you going to do? You're gonna just break the law all the time, and it ends up in anarchy ... I know they want to work, but to work then they have to break the law by getting a social security number illegally, or identity theft illegally, you know. They're breaking all kinds of laws just to get work here when they're illegal. If they're ... if they don't get in social security and the employer just gives them cash, then that's also a felony to not pay taxes, so it's breaking the law all the time.

Anne argues that illegal immigrants must break the law in order to get a job or live in the United States and are therefore are "breaking the law all the time." She believes that breaking the rule of law will lead to anarchy and the "breakdown" of the United States.

To Eric, obeying the law is a sacrifice. Obedience is required of all citizens if the rule of law is to prevail. Eric argues that people, law enforcement, and politicians cannot pick and choose which laws to follow and enforce:

Yes, and our values in this country are going. We're losing them. And we're losing them fast. No rule of law anymore. Only the laws they like, that the politicians like, are enforced. The ones they don't like, that lines their pockets, they're not enforced. ... There's laws you don't like; there's laws I don't like. But we follow them because they're the law. I follow them. I follow the laws you don't like because you follow the laws I don't like. It's what keeps this country, and me and you free.

He is concerned that this principle is no longer being followed when it comes to immigration law, and that it puts the freedom of the people at risk.

### **Work Ethic**

The value of work ethic has its roots in American's Puritan founding. Taking care of one's self and working hard are essential values within American identity. Anne said: "I think

that's one of the things that has made America, is the work ethic and ... taking care of oneself." Self-sufficiency is attainable in America because of the principles of equality upon which the country was founded. Respondents contend that in the United States there is enough opportunity for people to succeed, if they work hard. They emphasize that nothing is given for free, nor should it be.

Doug referred to the Declaration of Independence and asserted, "Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That's all we're guaranteed in this country." He emphasized that it is only the *pursuit* that we are guaranteed, indicating that happiness is something we have to work for. Kevin also cited to these unalienable rights and added:

[I]f you work hard, you follow the law, you do the things you're supposed to, you have the right to life, liberty and happiness. But you have to make it yourself. The government's not there to give it to you, but it gives you the opportunity.

Both of these responses suggest that equality of opportunity allows anyone, including immigrants, to become self-sufficient and independent, without help from the government. These ideals are the foundation of the American dream. George also contends that it largely depends on individuals to take advantage of opportunities available through the American dream. He believes people should come to America to pursue those opportunities and not expect others to provide things for them:

I can come to America because I can own General Motors if I put my mind to it. It all depends on me and what I do, not "You pay for my house, you pay for my food ... yeah I'll stay here if you do that."

Joe agrees with George that in America people have the opportunity to pursue anything they want to and explains why:

You can do whatever you want to do in life, as long as you get up and drive yourself to do it. You don't have anybody holding you down like in some of these other places. You know, drug cartel, corrupt police, that kind of stuff.

Joe suggests that America is unique in that there is an environment of order that allows opportunity to be possible, to thrive. Other countries, because of corruption and disorder, do not. Because America provides both an environment of order and the opportunities to get ahead, respondents do not excuse those who do not work hard and who rely on the government. Government handouts undermine the values of hard work and self-sufficiency. Doug explained, "I believe that people need to be responsible for themselves. ... If you give people things and they don't have to work then they're not going to work."

Self-sufficiency is a minimum requirement of an American. Good Americans give back and contribute to the country. Susan, a third-generation Spanish American, sums her feelings about those who do not give back: "If you're here to just take advantage of those privileges and you're not giving anything back, how could you feel good about calling yourself an American?" Susan argues that a good American does not think about what he can get, but how he can contribute. Many members of the UMP emphasize financial contributions: paying taxes, investing into the economy, and being accountable for spending and credit. In the excerpt below, Joe argues that being an American is largely a financial contribution:

[W]ork here, invest in here, and do your part and pay your taxes, like everybody else. If you want to follow your culture when you're here, that's more than—that's perfect, I think, that's what we asked for. I don't think there's anything you have to do to become American. You don't have to wear a certain hat or something. I think it's a matter of paying taxes into this—you're investing into your country, you know. It's like if you buy

a house or a piece of property or a ranch, you're putting your blood, sweat, and your money into it ... I mean, you're investing into your country. If they went through the process of becoming a citizen, you know, if they want to even retire, get their Social Security, go back to their own country to live, you did your time. Do what you want to do.

Joe's viewpoint diverges from the mainstream viewpoints in the UMP. He assigns great value to contributing financially and paying taxes. He is not concerned that immigrants might choose to return to live in another country. If they have paid taxes and contributed to social security, they are free to go. They have satisfied their financial contributions and can call themselves Americans.

For other members of the UMP, however, the fact that immigrants are not planning to settle in the United States makes all the difference. They argue that because illegal immigrants do not intend to settle in the United States, they are less likely to contribute to the United States.

Terry and David said:

T: They [illegal immigrants] are here for the money only and they send it back to their families and they consume.

D: They are just here for a quick cash get away. If they can't make it they'll just go somewhere else and leave it. Whereas we're invested in the community. This is where we have our families. This is where we choose to live. This is our way of giving back to the community – our training, our skills.

Terry and David contend that undocumented immigrants come to extract whatever they can.

Many respondents refuted the claim that undocumented immigrants contribute to the economy, citing examples of undocumented immigrants who live together in small apartments to save

money, and the large amount of remittances sent back to Mexico. They argue that this money will never be spent in the United States.

Aside from their perception that illegal immigrants have no desire to invest or contribute to the country, respondents stated that immigrants are coming from countries that, unlike the United States, have socialist governments and are used to receiving benefits and services provided by the government, including free education, housing, food, and health care. The members of the UMP said that illegals expect to receive these benefits when they arrive to the United States, instead of working to pay for them themselves. As illegal immigrants work in the informal economy, they are able to qualify for benefits such as food stamps, welfare, or housing assistance that American citizens working in the formal economy with the same income do not. Other UMP informants attributed the immigrants' ability to receive benefits to "anchor babies" – their U.S.-born children. Some members even argued that illegal immigrants receive benefits because they violated the laws, whether in misrepresenting income or household size, tax evasion, or fraud. Eric told me:

If you're illegal in this country, there's no poverty line. You go work for cash. You have American-born children. You go down to the welfare office, you have two or three kids, they give you \$500, \$600 a month in food stamps. They're [illegals] going to work, making as much as me, cash. Who's living high off the hog? The illegals .... Is that fair? Not fair at all is it. None .... They don't care about this country. What they care about is ... sending their money home, banking it ...

In the excerpt above, Eric summarizes the shared belief among some members of the UMP that there is a different standard for illegal immigrants and "there's no poverty line." This idea is based on the perception that illegal immigrants "work for cash," do not pay income taxes, and

have U.S.-born children, allowing illegal immigrants to live “high off the hog.” Eric reveals that it is more than just the fact that immigrants are receiving benefits, but that they are receiving benefits *and* do not even care about the United States.

Kevin shares in Eric’s frustration that illegal immigrants are receiving benefits and taking advantage of the system:

Now two, the services that they [illegal immigrants] basically utilize for free, that takes money out of yours and my pocket. My family that needs it can’t get it. But I have to pay for it; they have to pay for it. You know, there’s the medical services, the educational services, the WIC services. I mean, I’m appalled now as I go to the store and I stand in line and see person after person with the WIC cards, you know, taking basket after basket of groceries out of the store. I have family members that are in as dire straits as they are that can’t do that, but they still have to pay. I have family members that are in the construction business that are struggling while illegals are working. I have family members that can’t get medical insurance, so their struggling, that the illegals get for free.

Kevin is angered that he has to work for what he has and they do not. It upsets Kevin to see illegal immigrants getting benefits that his own family members need but cannot get: WIC, medical insurance, and even access to jobs. Many members of the UMP are frustrated that their tax dollars are supporting undocumented immigrants or their American-born children and not their own families, whom they think need as much or even more help.

The idea that illegal immigrants take advantage of the system was widespread. Aside from government-provided social services, respondents argue that illegal immigrants take advantage of the goodwill of private organizations and individuals. Joe shared his experience volunteering for Toys for Tots:

You know Christmastime comes around and people are donating toys to give to the children ... But when you're sitting there working and you're watching illegal immigrants ... pulling up there in Cadillac Escalades and brand new Ford Explorers grabbing bags of toys and loading them into their car and taking off .... Something's not right, you know. We're getting fleeced.

Joe saw illegal immigrants coming to take the toys donated for needy families who cannot afford presents for their children at Christmas, but they were driving new and expensive cars. Joe feels cheated because he thinks that illegal immigrants are just taking whatever they can get and that they do not actually need it.

### **Patriotism**

Being an American is an attitude of appreciation and reverence. Members' responses indicate that being an American first begins with the right attitude. Ruth, a fiery 80-year old woman, thinks that people who want to immigrate to the United States need to have, "the right attitude of this being God's ... this being a great country." She adds that what made America was "all of these people that wanted to get away from whatever, coming here to get away from it and making it a great place." Licia, a first-generation immigrant from Peru illustrates the "right attitude" described by Ruth in her account of her immigration to the United States:

It was something that I always dreamed of. I waited for ten years. I did everything they asked me to do...to be part of this, part of this country. It meant so much to me.

When I asked her what brought her to the United States, she said:

[T]he reason I came here is because my country was so crooked. There were so much robbery and distortion and everything else on the political system .... You know, a lot of the teachers were propagating communism in the universities. I mean, it was just horrible. You know, to come to a country where there's laws, where there's obedience, the people

go by what they believe in an orderly manner to me was amazing. It was amazing because I didn't think that actually existed in the world .... I really respected it, you know.

Licia's attitude exemplifies the kind of attitude members of the UMP think that people should have when coming to this country. Like immigrants that "wanted to get away from whatever," Licia wanted to get away from robbery, distortion and communism. Licia's story also demonstrates her attitude of appreciation for American principles of law, order and obedience.

The idea of America being a land of refuge and promise for all people seeking freedom, opportunity, and safety, resonates with the members of the UMP. They state that those who come to the United States should have an attitude of appreciation, recognizing that the United States is superior to all other nations, including their countries of origin. In the following excerpt George describes his feelings about immigrants who he felt did not have the right attitude:

Seeing these marches, why would, if I wanted to be American, why would I come into America and tell them how to run their country when I came from a third world country? Why if my country was so good, why am I here?

George assumes that the reason why immigrants come to the United States is to be American, and because America is better than the countries they emigrated from. Susan shared similar feelings about Mexican immigrants who think Mexico is better than the United States:

They don't mind taking the jobs, they don't mind collecting the wages, they don't mind receiving the benefits they've received over all the years, but they'll always sit and tell you how much better Mexico is. And more than once, we have said, "If Mexico is so much better, then what are you doing here? Go back there where it's better."

Susan goes so far as to say that those who do not acknowledge American superiority and appreciation for the United States should not even be in the United States.

*Loyalty.* Another important category of American patriotism is loyalty. For the Utah Minutemen, loyalty to the United States cannot be shared. Respondents indicated that immigrants show their loyalty to the United States by denouncing allegiance to their countries of origin and renouncing their citizenship. In this narrative, Eric and Susan express what loyalty means:

E: There's people out there in the world that want to be Americans, that actually want to be Americans. To be an American, you have to denounce the country of origin that you're from. Not dual citizenship, that's not an American. They can call themselves Americans, but they're not Americans .... Dual citizenship, to me, is a very dangerous situation....your loyalties are to another country, you're not American.

S: ... It's like being a family. You're either loyal to your family or you're not loyal to your family. And being a United States citizen to me, and maybe this is just because I was born and raised here and I'm very patriotic, part of being American is having that pride and standing up for America. But if you have this whole dual citizenship, nobody knows which side you're on. ... It's about having pride. It's about having loyalty. It's about understanding and appreciating what people before us have done to try to keep us having the privileges we have. That's what being an American is.

Victor also agreed with Eric and Susan that “You need to pick your allegiance,” and that citizenship “shows you where their loyalties lie.”

Licia and Doug Miller told of when Licia was sworn in as a United States citizen and the significance it had for her:

I went and pledged and they ask you, “You know, now you’re an American citizen, you’re not Peruvian anymore. You’re an American citizen?” I said, “Yes,” and they asked me, “Will you abide all the laws? Will you follow the rules? Will you love this country? Will you do what’s right?” And I said, “Yes, I would.” And I believe that. You know, and it was the greatest day of my life that day.

Licia also believes that becoming an American means no longer identifying as a Peruvian. She expresses no regret, only happiness and pride in her decision.

*The American Flag.* Samuel Huntington (2004:127) argues that “[I]n almost no other country is the flag so pervasively present and so central to national identity.” He points out that Americans pledge allegiance first to the flag, the symbol of the United States, and then to the United States. Within the Minutemen, the American flag is the most important symbol of American identity. When I asked respondents to define what it means to be an American, or what the American identity is, 71 percent of respondents mentioned the American flag. The flag symbolizes what America is and represents. Therefore, when the flag is disrespected, it is viewed as disrespect to America itself. When foreign flags are displayed, some respondents think it is a representation of dominance or superiority to the United States. Jim Gilchrist explained how differences in intention and display determine whether a foreign flag should be seen as a threat:

If somebody has a Mexican restaurant and they want to have the Mexican flag up there because it’s Mexican food, well what’s the problem? But if they’ve got the Mexican flag up there on the fourth of July and celebrating the fourth of July with the Mexican flag—and there have been incidences of that happening—there’s issue. It’s not about broadcasting their menu to prospective consumers. It’s about political and social dominion over their territory, and that can get dangerous. I think the American flag

should be flown everywhere and under that, below that of subservient position should be all other flags in accordance to the flag laws. Now not everybody respects that law and a lot of people don't know about it.

The United States Flag Code establishes advisory rules for display and care of the flag of the United States. As Gilchrist mentioned above, in accordance with U.S. Flag Code, all foreign flags should be displayed in a subservient position to the United States flag. Although this is a U.S. Federal law, there is no penalty for failure to comply with it, and many Americans have chosen to exercise their First Amendment rights to disrespect the American flag. Several of the Minutemen joined the movement because of an incident related to disrespect of the American flag.

Doug, after seeing an incident on TV in which the American flag had been flown upside down with a Mexican flag flown on top, was so upset that he was moved to join the Utah Minuteman Project. Mary, seeing protestors waving the Mexican flag in a march said, "It's disgusting. If they're going to do that, why don't they just stay in their own land, you know?"

Joe was also moved to action when he saw that the American flag on the Mexican consulate building was old and tattered, but the Mexican flag was fresh and recently changed. He told me:

[T]he Mexican consulate down there, you can see those people don't respect our country .... behind it [the Mexican flag] is the American flag and it's falling off the pole. And you're hearing about Mrs. Jones from Magna who just lost her kid in Afghanistan for that flag, you know. I think that that really got me mad. I mean that's disrespect, you know. Take your consulate and take it back to Mexico. If you have enough nerve to get up there and change your flag, have common decency to change the flag next to you. That's where

your foundation of your building is sitting on. ... It's humiliating. You know, you look at the families of 9/11 and stuff like that, you know that hits me from home. I've lived there; I've been in those buildings there.

For Joe, the American flag represents all those who have sacrificed their lives for this country, it represents the 9/11 victims and their families. As a New Yorker, the flag has even more significance to Joe.

### **Discussion**

This study contributes another definition of American identity to the growing body of research on this subject. Like Huntington (2004), many Minutemen echo the argument that Latino immigrants, especially illegal Mexican immigrants, are threatening the makeup of American identity. However, the Minutemen assert that it is not Mexicans who are threatening American identity; it is illegal immigrants, regardless of national origin. The Minutemen address many of the same concerns as Huntington when he talks about assimilation – ethnic enclaves, hyphenated Americans, not speaking English. However, the Minutemen also argue that lack of assimilation is a sign of cultural superiority and dominance, and for Mexican immigrants, *Reconquista*. Although Huntington mentions the British system of law as an important element of American identity, he does not place as much importance upon respect for the law as the Minutemen. For the Minutemen, one cannot be an American without respect for and obedience to the law. This idea sets their concept of American identity from others. In their *American Creed*, the Minutemen believe that anyone, even American citizens, who do not follow the law, is Un-American. Like Huntington, the Minutemen emphasize the values of work ethic and self-sufficiency as fundamental elements of American identity. They further elaborate this idea and contend that immigrants, coming from socialist countries, do not take pride in self-sufficiency and hard work, like Americans do. They see this as a uniquely American characteristic, one that

illegal immigrants do not possess. Finally, the Minutemen place deep importance on patriotism. Very few definitions of American identity stress love of country and loyalty to country as much as the Minutemen definition of American identity. For the Minutemen, to be a true American is to love America and *only* America.

While this is a small step forward in the literature on American identity, it is a significant contribution to the literature on the Minutemen.

### **Conclusion**

In this paper, I have used ethnographic qualitative research methods to understand how the Minutemen define American identity. I have identified four key elements of American identity: assimilation, respect for law, work ethic and patriotism. In this study, I have found that, in many ways, the Minutemen have defined American identity by answering the question of who is *not* an American. In their view, illegal immigrants are not American.

It is against the backdrop of illegal immigration that anti-illegal immigrant movements have defined themselves, defined America, and defined who is an American. By emphasizing the elements of American identity that stand in most striking contrast to illegal immigration, they exclude undocumented immigrants from who they define as American.

The cover of a recent TIME magazine reads, “We are Americans,” with an asterisk following the title. At the bottom of the page the asterisk reads, “Just not legally” The cover photograph features the faces of undocumented immigrants, including Jose Antonio Vargas, who came to the United States from the Philippines when he was 12 years old. After publically coming out as an undocumented immigrant in a New York Times article, “My Life as an Undocumented Immigrant” (Vargas 2011), Vargas founded DefineAmerican, a movement that seeks to bring “new voices into the immigration conversation” and answer the question: How do

we define an American? (DefineAmerican 2011). On his website, Vargas writes, “I loved America the moment I got here, and embraced the language, the culture and the people.... If I worked hard enough, if I achieved enough, I felt I could earn what it means to be an American” (DefineAmerican 2011b). Vargas fits the Minutemen’s definition of an American in every way, except that he is undocumented. He challenges how the Minutemen and other anti-illegal immigrant movements have constructed American identity within the bounds of legal status. Vargas argues that he too is American.

On June 15, 2012, the day after Vargas’ story was featured in TIME magazine, President Obama announced the halt of deportations for approximately 1.4 million unauthorized youth who were brought to this country as children (American Immigration Council 2012). In the President’s address he too argued that these undocumented immigrants are Americans: “They are Americans in their heart, in their minds, in every single way but one: on paper” and “for all intents and purposes, are Americans -- they’ve been raised as Americans; understand themselves to be part of this country...” (The White House 2012).

Amidst all the voices seeking to define what it means to be an American, this study contributes another voice and provides a better understanding of how the members of the UMP see the world. It is important to that as our country confronts the challenges of immigration reform and seeks to answer the question of who is an American, that all voices be heard, including the voices of the Minutemen. Future research should examine how other people, groups and organizations in the United States are trying to redefine what it means to be American and the implications for those it includes and excludes, especially in the context of illegal immigration.

## Afterward

I never expected that my views on immigration would be so impacted by undertaking this study. Conducting fieldwork was an emotional roller coaster. At times I felt empathetic toward the Minutemen and their cause. Other times I felt bombarded by their rhetoric and arguments. I tried to remain unaffected, seeking only to understand their perspectives on illegal immigration, but could not help questioning my own. I wanted to know if anything the Minutemen were saying was true. I would then catch myself hearing people speak Spanish and wonder if they were illegal. I hated that their arguments were affecting how I viewed others. It was only two years later, after leaving enough time and space to separate myself from the data that I feel like I can more objectively evaluate my own position on illegal immigration. This research had a tremendous impact on me. It has forced me to become more balanced, to consider all sides of immigration, and to see the world from another perspective. At the same time, it has reinforced my own beliefs and heightened my sensitivity to the stereotyping and exclusion of vulnerable groups, especially undocumented immigrants.

Despite my careful preparations and hopes to stay neutral and objective, the research did not go exactly according to my plan. Respondents often asked for our opinions and positions on issues. One respondent even asked when we were planning on joining the Minutemen. These questions were sometimes awkward. Sometimes they were funny. I always answered honestly, which was not always a good thing. Other times my honesty helped build trust. During an interview with Eric and Susan, Eric directly asked us what we thought of the Minutemen before meeting them (E: Eric, S: Susan, M: Michele, K: Keaton).

E: Did you first start off thinking we were a bunch of gun toting crazies?

M: Yep.

E: Did you?

M: Yeah, I mean not “gun toting crazies,” but definitely not what you guys are, definitely not.

K: But just from everything we’ve read, the media portrays you really terribly.

M: Yes.

E: The liberal media?

M: Yeah, they portray you in a very different light from who you actually are. It’s been great getting to know you guys.

E: But that’s what I really want to know, is why you’ve done it on the Minutemen because I figured you had an idea, listening to the media, that we were a bunch of crazies and radicals and everything. Well, I appreciate you guys and like I said I hope you have the right opinion of us now.

M: Yeah, definitely.

E: That we’re not a bunch of radicals...

M: No, that was gone after our first interview and after the meeting.

S: I thought they were too, to be honest with you. That’s why when he first told me he was getting involved with that kind of stuff, I was like, “Are you kidding me?”

E: When I first got in there, I didn’t think any different. Okay, and I want you to know that. Because I went by what I was reading in the media too, you know.

Being honest actually became a way to establish rapport, because as Eric also revealed, he had the same perception of the Minutemen before joining the group. With practice, I learned how to navigate through their questions. However, I must say that I am grateful that no one asked me what I thought about dual citizenship, because I am a dual citizen.

In the end, I could not have asked for a research project more suited to my life. I have become a more informed, balanced person as a result of this study. I am happy to say that I am still in contact with several of the Minutemen. Last year when a couple of graduate students were planning to attend a UMP meeting I contacted George and Terry to let them know that they would be coming. The students were warmly welcomed by the group and Terry sent along a Christmas card back with them with a picture of his newborn daughter – Merica.

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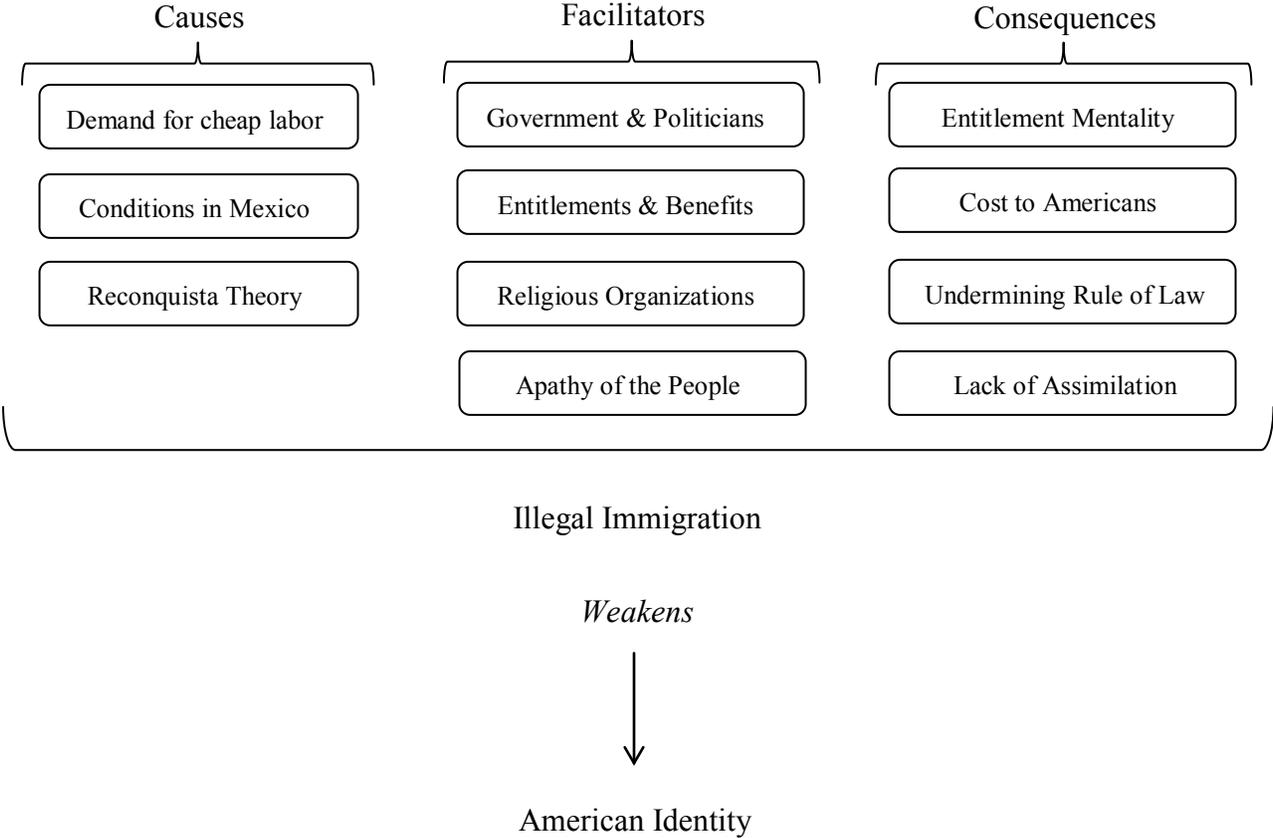
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**Table 1.** Utah Minuteman Project Demographics

<b>Name</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Race &amp;/or Ethnicity</b>	<b>Immigrant Generation</b>	<b>Religion</b>	<b>Highest Level of Education</b>	<b>Occupation</b>
Victor	M	Mexican	4th Generation	Catholic	Some College	Electrical Engineer
George	M	White	Native-born	LDS	College	Self-employed
Howard	M	White	Native-born	LDS	Some College	Retired Qwest Electrician
Ruth	F	White /Cherokee	Native-born	Christian	High School	Retired Transcriptionist
Frank	M	White	Native-born	LDS	College	Marketing Manager
Mary	F	Spanish	2nd Generation	Catholic	High School	Retired Mill Worker
Joe	M	Puerto Rican/Italian	2nd Generation	Catholic	High School	Small Business Owner
Roger	M	White	Native-born	LDS	Some College	RV Park Manager
Huong	F	Vietnamese	1st Generation	None	High School	Homemaker
Terry	M	White	Native-born	Christian	College	Purchasing Manager
Susan	F	Spanish	3rd Generation	LDS	College	Accountant
Eric	M	White	Native-born	LDS	High School	Dry Waller
Anne	F	White	2nd Generation	LDS	Some College	Homemaker
Tom	M	White	Native-born	LDS	Some College	Retired Cabinet Maker
Nancy	F	White	Native-born	Christian	Some College	Homemaker
Jack	M	White	Native-born	Christian	Graduate degree	Small Business Owner
Licia	F	Peruvian	1st Generation	LDS	College	Property Manager
Doug	M	White	Native-born	Catholic	College	Property Manager
Kevin	M	White	Native-born	LDS	College	Retired Business Manager
Patty	F	White	Native-born	LDS	High School	Homemaker
David	M	Mexican	2nd Generation	Christian	High School	Brick Mason

**Figure 1.** Diagram of coding scheme.



**Figure 2.** Focused coding.

Code	Sub-code	# References	# Respondents
Causes of Illegal Immigration	Demand for cheap labor	18	11
	Conditions in Mexico	10	8
	Reconquista	7	7
Facilitators of Illegal Immigration	Government & politicians	33	13
	Entitlements & benefits	28	13
	Religious organizations	6	4
	Apathy of the people	5	6
Consequences of Illegal Immigration	Entitlement mentality	29	13
	Cost to Americans	25	13
	Undermining Rule of Law	21	13
	Lack of assimilation	9	6
American Identity		315	18

**Figure 3.** American identity sub-codes.

Code	Sub-code	# References	# Respondents
American Identity	Assimilation	85	18
	Respect for Law	81	15
	Work Ethic	75	14
	Patriotism	74	11