

PATRIOT ACTIVISTS: THE PERENNIAL CYCLE OF U.S. NATIVISM

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is an analysis how nativist activists articulate what they perceive to be a loss of power regarding their own race, class, and national status because of undocumented immigration in the United States. The research is a qualitative study of semi-structured interviews with nativist activists who live in U.S. states that share a border with Mexico. I situate these data in the historical and contemporary context of nativist activism. Nativist activism is defined as exclusionary practices that target immigrants. The participants in this study were involved in activist groups with the explicit goal to eliminate undocumented immigration to the United States, aimed particularly at migrants who cross the southwest U.S.-Mexico border. Media representations of these groups depicted them as militia members whose activism was extreme and ideology overtly racist. I argue that the racism these groups espoused is better examined as it intersects with and is inextricably linked to class and nation. The data is examined using the power devaluation model that provides a theoretical framework for right-wing social movements by analyzing how political, economic, and social changes explain nativist activism.

Keywords: nativism, immigration, right-wing social movements

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In his speech to announce his presidential candidacy on June 16, 2015, Donald Trump stated that “when Mexico sends its people, they’re not sending their best.” They’re not sending you. They’re sending people that have lots of problems, and they’re bringing those problems with us. They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.” (The New York Times 2015). President Trump was known for his anti-immigrant stance and subsequent policies that supported building a wall between the United States and Mexico, deporting asylum seekers, and decreasing legal immigration by half of its current rate. The anti-immigrant nativism espoused by President Trump and embraced by his supporters was hardly new to American politics. One of the many contradictions of U.S. politics and culture is that Americans pride themselves on being a nation of immigrants while engaging in a perpetual cycle of nativist practices and ideologies that determine who belongs in America (Young 2017).

This article uses the U.S. nativist movement as an empirical case study of an American right-wing movement that sought to maintain race, class, and nation-based power previously held by its members before structural changes shifted their status. The research is a qualitative study of semi-structured interviews with nativist activists in the decade following the terrorist attacks

on September 11, 2001. This timeframe is important because it was during this decade that the U.S. experienced a sharp increase in anti-immigrant sentiment and activism (Gottschalk and Greenberg, 2019). The question that this study seeks to answer is how do nativist activists articulate their own race, class, and national identity vis-à-vis demographic shifts in their communities and the nation. To answer this question, I rely on Rory McVeigh's (2009) concept of power devaluation to argue that nativists become activists because of their perceived loss of power based on their racial, national, and class identity.

In *The Rise of the Ku Klux Klan: Right-Wing Movements and National Politics* (2009), Rory McVeigh argues that right-wing mobilization occurs when established power relations are threatened. This includes both objective measurable loss and perceived loss, even when one's perception of loss is empirically unfounded. The interviews with nativist activists provide a window into understanding how they articulate why they joined a group or organization and why they have embraced a nativist ideology. I analyse both what they say and the implications of their beliefs. Unlike some right-wing activists that explicitly embrace a racist ideology, most of the nativists I interviewed were adamant that they were not racists. This of course does not mean that they were not just because they said so. The power devaluation framework is helpful for illuminating how nativists operate from a position of white privilege. They espouse a patriotic platform in the name of saving America from the supposed ills of "illegal immigration." In doing so, they mask how they operate from a place of racial privilege and reproduce racial inequality and racism.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Right Wing Social Movements

Historically, the literature on social movements concentrated on activists who mobilize from a left-wing ideological position as their springboard for social change (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilley 2001). Scholars later turned to understanding activism from the right in the context of social movement theory rather than ideological extremism (Berlet and Lyons 2018). One theory in particular, the power devaluation model, is useful for understanding why participants join nativist groups (McVeigh 2009). Rory McVeigh argues that structural changes in the economy, politics, and society explained the growth of perhaps the most notorious right-wing organization in the U.S. – the Ku Klux Klan (McVeigh 2009). He showed how participation in the organization was a response to the devaluation of power for white middle class Americans in the 1920s when prosperity was unevenly distributed. The goal of white Protestant Americans who joined the Klan was to restore and preserve benefits and privileges (either real or perceived) that they believed had shifted to Black Americans, Catholics, and immigrants. Their activism is explained as a response to changes that threatened to disrupt their advantaged position. While the cause of right-wing activism against racial others is rooted in structural changes, activists use racist constructions of "the stranger" to frame their grievances (McVeigh and Sikkink 2005).

Matthew Ward applied the theoretical framework that McVeigh outlined and showed how anti-immigrant activism along the U.S.-Mexico border was a response to shifts in economic and immigration policies (Ward 2017; Ward 2013). Ward found that states with higher concentrations of Hispanic people correlated with higher rates of nativist activism (Ward 2017). Population concentration alone did not trigger nativist activism but rather structural

changes in the U.S. labor market. In the immediate aftermath of the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994, the number of Mexican nationals migrating to the U.S. nearly doubled between 1995-1999 compared to the period between 1990-1994 just before NAFTA's implementation (Passel 2005). While this trade agreement altered the U.S. manufacturing sector, its most devastating effects were aimed at reorganizing Mexico's manufacturing sector into overwhelmingly that of sweatshop labor (e.g., Maquiladoras) and nearly obliterating the agricultural industry in Mexico. Mexicans were left with few choices for survival; one of which was to migrate to the U.S. in search of work. As migrant flows to the U.S. increased so too did stringent immigration policies that shaped where migrants cross.

In 1993, Operation Hold the Line was implemented in El Paso, Texas and in 1994 Operation Gatekeeper was the second effort to stem the flow of migrants just south of San Diego, California. These two "operations" had two consequences for migrants. First, they determined where migrants cross the border. An increased presence of immigration officials in more populated areas such as El Paso and San Diego shifted migration patterns to more remote areas in the U.S. southwest that is largely desert. The second effect was the increased militarization on the border (Nevins 2002). Consequently, migrants were more likely to cross in remote areas along the border and face an increased militarized presence from both the U.S. Border Patrol as well as nativist groups that have taken up the cause of deterring migration from Mexico. The increased number of unauthorized migrants into the U.S. magnified the divide between legal and "illegal" immigrants and solidified the language in the U.S. immigration bureaucracy that nativists embrace (Ackerman 2014).

Perhaps the most common critique of globalization from the left is that neoliberal policies have created a world where capital and consumer goods move across national borders with ease while human beings are subject to an array of immigration laws that tether them to a particular place. Capital and goods tend to move most freely from the global south to the global north while people in the global south are transfixed as they are often prohibited from entering the global north. Consequently, social justice movements across the globe promote migrants' rights as one way to remedy the unevenness of the effects of neoliberalism. Activists on the left argue that they advance global justice movements through their critiques of neoliberal policies that facilitate the free flow of capital and goods across national borders that overwhelmingly benefit corporations and states in the global north while leaving a trail of economic, social, and political devastation for those living in the global south (Hollifield and Foley 2022).

Scholarship is now emerging about those who mobilize on the right who too are critical, albeit for very different reasons, of globalization and its discontents, particularly through the rise of nationalism (Doyle 2021). The American right is also aware of the consequences of neoliberal policies, such as the outsourcing of jobs by corporations that seek cheap labor. However, the American right does not take up the cause of migrants' rights in its critique of globalization. Instead, activists on the right argue that undocumented migrants are responsible for much of the demise of middle-class America. In this respect, the American right is threatened by the deterioration of the physical geographical border between the U.S. and Mexico where the lion's share of undocumented migrants enter the U.S. Moreover, they are fearful of the erosion of class and racial boundaries between middle-class and poor and white and Brown that ostensibly is destroying white middle-class America (Huntington, 2021).

While populism surged under the Trump Presidency, it was hardly unique to the Trump administration (Béland 2020; Astrada and Astrada 2019). The radical right has been a long and active part of American politics during the twentieth century (Mulloy 2018). The rise of the Tea Party that many nativist groups funneled into after the border patrol groups dissipated came on the heels of the election of President Barack Obama (Williams 2002). Nativist policies are not tied to a specific political party and are not exclusively part of a conservative political agenda (Denvir 2020). Nor is nativism specific to the U.S. as global right-wing movements incorporate anti-immigrant ideas in their grievances (López-Alves and Johnson. 2019; Hogan and Haltinner 2015).

2.2 History of U.S. Nativism

The term “nativism” in its contemporary use is most commonly associated with exclusionary practices regarding immigrants (Perea 1997). In the mid-1990s, anti-immigrant groups in the U.S. flourished throughout the country, especially in states with large immigrant populations. Nativism is hardly a product of the last fifteen years; its roots can be traced to the European colonization of North America. By the end of the nineteenth century, the genocide against Native Americans, the enslavement of Africans, and exclusionary immigration laws laid the groundwork for the nativist movements that flourished in the twentieth century.

Until the late nineteenth century, most immigration laws and policies were controlled by individual colonies, and then states. The Immigration Act of 1891 placed immigration law under the sole purview of the U.S. federal government. While states were overwhelmingly responsible for immigration prior to 1891, federal legislation on immigration did exist, such as the 1798 Alien and Sedition Acts which allowed the government to deport immigrants considered “subversive.” Groups deemed “subversive,” as defined by the state in any particular moment, appear throughout American history. The U.S. government and the American people considered different immigrant groups a threat in different time periods and that an immigrant’s national or racial identity, for example, is often sufficient evidence to suspect someone of subversive activities (Gerstle 2004).

For example, in the eighteenth century, Americans targeted the “Irish peril,” a perceived threat to a Protestant-based state that feared Catholic influence and sparked America’s first nativist movement, the “Know-Nothings” in the 1840s (Gerstle 2004). That same century, Chinese immigrants were the first group that the federal government targeted for racial exclusion. The fear of non-white immigrants gaining a majority culminated in the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 (Lee 2003). During the Great Depression, anti-immigrant sentiment was inextricably linked to anxiety about the spread of communism and xenophobia that took on a specifically anti-Semitic form (Benowitz 2002).

Because most immigrants have come to the United States to work, nearly every immigrant group has been branded subversive by Americans during economic downturns that lead to a scarcity of jobs and falling wages for U.S. citizens. Mexican immigrants represent perhaps the best example of how immigration policies and the treatment of immigrants are tied to the economy. Mexicans have been encouraged to immigrate when there is a dearth of workers in the U.S., exemplified in the Bracero program that was initiated in 1942 that facilitated Mexican agricultural workers coming to America during the U.S. involvement in World War II, and discouraged during economic recessions, such as the early 1990s effort to curtail Mexican

immigration that materialized in Operation Hold the Line and Operation Gatekeeper (Nevins 2002).

While scapegoating immigrants for the social and economic woes of the nation has been a mainstay of right-wing activism, which immigrants become targets and for what reasons change over time. Right-wing activism fueled by anti-Semitism and panic over the spread of communism still exists today. However, it is dwarfed by the contemporary right-wing nativist platform that is anti-Arab and anti-Muslim in the decades following the September 11 terrorist attacks; anti-Hispanic, aimed particularly at immigrants from Mexico; and fearful of globalization and its assumed concomitant effects of open-borders and the demise of national sovereignty. The specificity of what defines the foreign other that nativists fear changes over time. The examples of various immigrant groups that the U.S. government has targeted as subversive illuminates the flexibility of the category. No one group is permanently considered subversive. Yet at any time in American history there is at least one immigrant group that occupies the feared category. The commonality across right-wing movements is a defined other that takes the form of a noncitizen immigrant in nativist movements.

2.3 Nativist Groups and the U.S.-Mexico Border

Nativist groups are not monolithic and it is important to distinguish how they focus their activism. The 1980s Official English language movement produced groups such as English First, a Washington-based lobby whose founders, and John Tanton in particular, linked Hispanic immigration to the demise of a monolithic linguistic culture in America (Perea 1997). The California Collation for Immigration Reform (CCIR) was born from support for Proposition 187 that sought to forbid the use of social services such as healthcare and public education by undocumented immigrants and their children (Perea 1997). While dozens of nativist groups emerged in the 1980s and 1990s, the border activist of the early twenty-first century garnered the greatest attention.

In April 2005, approximately 900 people across America came together in Tombstone, Arizona to voice their anger about what they believed to be the woes of undocumented migration in their communities and the country (The New York Times 2005a). This event was termed “The Minuteman Project” by Jim Gilchrist, a nativist activist from California, and was organized jointly by Jim Gilchrist and Chris Simcox, owner of the now defunct newspaper The Tombstone Tumbleweed in Tombstone, Arizona (Gilchrist and Corsi 2006). Chris Simcox had made a “call to arms” in the October 24, 2002 edition of the Tombstone Tumbleweed inviting civilians to form a “citizens’ border patrol militia” for the thirty-day event in April (Simcox 2002). Although Gilchrist and Simcox shared the belief that a movement to end illegal immigration was imperative to restore America from the invasion posed by undocumented migrants, their alliance was short lived; they parted ways at the end of April 2005 with Gilchrist retaining the name Minuteman Project for his California based organization and its state chapter spinoffs, while Simcox became the leader of the newly formed Minuteman Civil Defense Corps (MCDC) based in Arizona and its state chapter affiliates.

The Minuteman Project was not the first border watch comprised of civilians who attempted to deter undocumented migration. In October 1977, Grand Dragon Tom Metzger and Imperial Wizard David Duke of the Ku Klux Klan organized a border watch at the San Ysidro, California port of entry (ACLU 2006). On November 4, 1989, Muriel Watson, the widow of

Border Patrol Chief, George Watson, organized the first “Light Up the Border” demonstration on the U.S.-Mexico border near San Diego where civilians parked their cars along the border and beamed their headlights in an effort to show the lack of security and ease at which undocumented immigrants can cross into the United States (U.S. Congressional Record 1999).

Five years before the Minuteman event, in 2000, Jack Foote of Abilene, Texas, formed Ranch Rescue, the first militia style group with the specific intent of stopping undocumented immigrants from entering the country. Ranch Rescue performed “operations” such as Operation Hawk in 2002 where members stopped drug mules and seized 280 pounds of marijuana on a ranch in Lochiel, Arizona and Operation Falcon in 2003 in Hebronville, Texas where Jack Foote, along with other members of Ranch Rescue in addition to the property owners, was accused of assaulting and detaining two undocumented Salvadorans. While Ranch Rescue held other operations after 2003, the negative publicity and legal fees associated with the fallout of Operation Falcon brought Ranch Rescue to a close (Doty 2009; Doty 2007).

The greatest significance of the April 2005 Minuteman Project was not the event itself – it was one of many civilian border operations in the last twenty-five years – but that it galvanized the nativist movement and spun dozens of other border watch groups and anti-undocumented immigration organizations across the country. The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), a civil rights organization that tracks hate groups, documented over forty anti-illegal immigration border watch groups within six months of the April 2005 Minuteman Project event (Buchanan and Hothouse 2005). Nativist groups proliferated to 166 in 2008 operating in thirty-eight states and the District of Columbia (SPLC 2009). Between 2010 and 2013, 575 nativist groups were documented in the U.S. (Ward 2017). The increase in the number of nativist groups maps to the increase in the undocumented immigrant population. The number of unauthorized immigrants peaked at 12.2 million in 2007. By 2016, the number had dropped to 10.7 million, the lowest since 2004 (Passal and Cohn 2018). From 2007 to 2016, California, Arizona, and New Mexico all reported significant decreases in the unauthorized immigrant population (Passal and Cohn 2018). Consequently, the number of nativist groups decreased. By 2021, there were only eighteen anti-immigrant groups operating in the United States (SPLC 2021).

The U.S. nativist movement of the first decade of the twenty-first century tapped into Americans’ anxiety about an immigrant takeover using “invasion” discourse in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attack (Maulkin 2002). Nativist activists in the southwest harnessed the language of those from two decades earlier that feared the Latino threat (Estep 2017; Chavez 2008), demographic shifts through birthright citizenship and the pejorative term “anchor baby” (Joon et al 2018), and the disappearance of jobs that had shifted to immigrants (Nicholls 2016). These groups garnered the attention of scholars who did ethnographic studies (Shapira 2013), including groups that supported migrants and worked in opposition to the nativists demonstrating both right-wing and left-wing mobilization in Border States (Elcioglu 2020; Oxford 2009). While the concentration of these groups was in the southwestern region of the U.S., anti-immigrant activism was also documented outside of the southwest (Ebert and Okamoto 2015; Stewart et al 2015).

The military-style tactics of the citizen border patrol groups garnered the greatest media attention when President Bush called them “vigilantes” (The New York Times 2005a). James Gibson (1994) argues that in post-Vietnam America the warrior emerged as one who could

undo the political and economic woes facing American society through paramilitary actions. He shows how in the face of changing political and economic structures (i.e., globalization, although Gibson does not use this term) and the family (e.g. the rise of the feminist movement and men's perceived loss of power vis-à-vis women's increases in power) that men began to "dream" of how they might reclaim their lives and country. Nativist activists did not quite live up to the warrior dream as some have argued that the border patrol groups do not accomplish anything except serve as a meeting place with other like-minded people (Shapira 2013).

3.0 METHODS

This research is based on qualitative data that the author collected between 2002-2009. I interviewed a total of sixty members of nativist groups in California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas for the larger project. All interviews were semi-structured, tape-recorded, and transcribed. All names are pseudonyms. Participants were recruited through the organizations in which they were members. The organizations that the interviewees discussed in this article were members of include California Coalition for Immigration Reform (CCIR), Ranch Rescue, Civil Homeland Defense, Minuteman Civil Defense Core (MCDC), Patriot Border Alliance (PBA), United We Stand, Texas Border Volunteers (TBV), Citizens for Immigration Reform, and the New Mexico Rough Riders. Some of the interviewees were leaders of their organization. Most were members only. Nearly all of the organizations are now defunct.

In addition to interviews, I visited private property where these groups staged border patrols, observed day labor site protests, and attended organizational meetings. The sample for this article draws from sixteen interviews with seven men and nine women who were involved in nine groups. Fourteen of the participants identified as white, one as Black, and one as American of Mexican ancestry.

The majority of anti-illegal immigration activists were at least fifty years old at the time of the interview. Many credit their commitment to patriotism as a generational attribute. While some of the participants I interviewed were involved in various conservative organizations prior to their nativist activism, most members of the nativist movement were new to activism.

There is an important gendered aspect of nativist activism. Border watches, an assembly of citizen soldiers who use militia style tactics to patrol the U.S.-Mexico border, and day labor site protests, nativist demonstrations in public and commercial spaces where male immigrants gather in hopes of finding work for the day, are dominated by male activists. Conversely, many nativist organizations hold meetings in cities such as Los Angeles, Phoenix, and Houston that have nearly equal numbers of men and women and in some cases slightly more women than men. This aligns with other studies that have found large numbers of women in nativist groups (Haltinner 2016).

The primary focus of these groups is national identity and all members are expected to be U.S. citizens, native born or naturalized. These groups are overwhelmingly comprised of white Americans. The anti-undocumented immigration arm of the nativist movement does not espouse racist rhetoric like that of right-wing racist hate groups that make clear that non-whites are not welcome in the group. To the contrary, anti-undocumented immigration nativist groups welcome people of color – legal immigrants of color and their descendants in particular – as evidence that their struggle is about legality rather than race. However, the discourses these

groups deploy about nation and belonging is inextricably bound up with notions of race and ethnicity. Most members of the nativist movement I have met consider themselves middle class (although nativist activists span class lines) and blame undocumented immigrants for the decline of the middle class. They are nostalgic as they reminisce about their neighborhoods and communities prior to the “invasion” of immigrants.

Because I am primarily concerned with why someone would join a nativist group and engage in activism to deter immigration, I focused on members and leaders of organizations rather than individuals who do not participate in nativist groups. One could embrace nativist ideology and beliefs and never join an organization. When I started attending nativist groups’ activities and interviewing their members in California in 2002, I was driven by the desire to know why U.S. citizens were moved to the point of activism to deter migrants from entering the country. While I remain critical of the xenophobic and racist discourses and behaviors among many nativists, I am sympathetic to some personal stories that detail property destruction, crime victimization, and unemployment, even if I am persuaded that their anger may be directed more effectively at governments and corporations that create migration flows rather than the migrants themselves.

I use terms such as “migrants” when referring to those who cross borders and “undocumented immigrants” for those whom the U.S. government does not recognize as having a current legal status in the U.S. Conversely, nativist activists use terms such as “illegal” immigration, “illegal” immigrants, and the more pejorative “illegals” to refer to immigrants. I use the term “illegal” and its variants only when discussing nativists’ discourses of migration.

Below is a table that lists the names of those interviewed, the state where they engaged in activism, and the organizations they were involved in.

Table: Interviews

Name	State	Nativist Groups
Jack	Texas	Texas Border Volunteers (TBV)
Susan	Arizona	Civil Homeland Defense (CHD)
Dan	New Mexico	New Mexico Rough Riders
Erin	California	California Coalition for Immigration Reform (CCIR) Ranch Rescue
Molly	Arizona	Minuteman Civil Defense Corp (MDCD) United We Stand
Fred	Arizona	Minuteman Civil Defense Corp (MDCD)
Samuel	California	California Coalition for Immigration Reform (CCIR)
Tom	Arizona	American Border Patrol
Henry	Texas	Texas Border Volunteers (TBV)
Cynthia	California	California Coalition for Immigration Reform (CCIR)
Maria	California	California Coalition for Immigration Reform (CCIR)
Nancy	Arizona	Minuteman Civil Defense Corp (MDCD)
Wanda	California	California Coalition for Immigration Reform (CCIR) Ranch Rescue Voices of Citizens Together

Betty	Texas	Minuteman Civil Defense Corp (MDCD)
Mary	Texas	Citizens for Immigration Reform
Ted	New Mexico	Minuteman Civil Defense Corp (MDCD) Patriots Border Alliance (PBA)

4.0 RESULTS

Four general themes capture how nativists talk about what drove them to activism to deter undocumented migrants from coming to the U.S. These themes are community changes, work, social services, and assimilation. The first theme, community changes, includes how border communities, particularly rural ranches and farms, are transformed when mass migrations of people flow through their area. Activists discuss property damage and migrants’ belongings (what they call “trash”) that are abandoned. It includes how neighborhoods in cities are transformed when migrants take up residence and the demographic shifts from predominantly white middle-class areas to those populated by poor migrants, predominantly from Mexico. The second theme, work, focuses on the types of work that undocumented migrants do and the impact it has on nativist activists’ employment opportunities and shifts in the economy. The third theme, social services, discusses how nativists view the undocumented population as a drain on the social services that only U.S. citizens deserve. These include welfare subsidies and access to healthcare. Nativist activists are especially concerned with what they call “anchor babies,” U.S.-born children whose parents are undocumented immigrants, and how they provide a means for migrants to gain access to social and economic benefits. The fourth theme, assimilation, reveals how nativist activists are moved to action by migrants who do not assimilate into American culture. They discuss language (bilingualism) and multiculturalism as obstacles that prevent migrants from assimilating into white, middle-class, American culture.

4.1 Community Changes

Nativist activists gave examples of changes in their communities which included deterioration of neighborhoods, property damage, and increased crime. Jack, a member of the Texas Border Volunteers (TBV) and a private property owner in southern Texas detailed his frustration with the destruction on his property:

I had a nice trailer house on my ranch. They chopped a hole in the roof to get into it. They built a fire in the sink to cook food. They destroyed that trailer house. They cut my fences. They destroyed the water sources for my cattle. They turned the water on for a submersible pump and burned up a \$2500 submersible pump – twice in two weeks. These people have absolutely no respect for our country, our property, or our lives.

Jack’s use of the plural possessive “our” differentiates those who are American, have property rights in the U.S., and whose embodiment is bound to the nation, from migrants whom he identifies as others who encompass the group “they” and are located outside the boundaries of American citizenship. He relayed the fear that many families have:

Some are so frustrated and scared that their families are moving to San Antonio and Corpus Christi to keep from having a major incident happen to them on their property. They’re afraid of being murdered on their property by these criminals that are crossing

private property. Their children can't go horseback riding or go running around on the ranch, it's just not safe. Having a ranch right on the highway, I was having my fences cut seven and eight times a night. My cattle were getting on the highway and in Texas, if a cow gets on a major highway and somebody runs into it, you're liable.

Jack situates his activism based on the erosion of his rights as a private property owner. He speaks for others in the community who do not feel safe on their own ranches and cannot enjoy the freedom that rural life provides white middle-class property owners. Jack discussed what many nativists articulated as a problem with migrants who will never be middle-class and that they are helping to import poverty when he stated that: "these people are the dregs of society. They come from dirt poor environments with no running water. They are absolutely the most impoverished people on the face of the earth." He voiced what other nativist activists feared when poverty is imported into the U.S.

Susan was involved in Civil Homeland Defense (CHD), a group comprised of local activists in the Tombstone, Arizona area that was a precursor to the Minuteman Civil Defense Corps (MCDC) organization that began in April 2005. Susan lived near the Arizona-Mexico border and started noticing changes in her community, mostly items left in the Sonora desert such as backpacks, clothes, and toiletries around the year 2000. Her proximity to a state highway that is popular destination where migrants gather who have been escorted through the desert by a smuggler and are waiting for their pre-arranged ride to a safehouse in Tucson or Phoenix made her neighborhood a high traffic area for migrants. Once they reach their destination the smuggler collects the requisite fees that relatives in the United States pay to reunite with family members. One day Susan was waiting with her daughter for the school bus and noticed a group of migrant men "hiding in the grass" in an embankment near the bus stop. Susan started a nearly daily routine of photographing migrants incorporating the proximity of the bus stop and school bus and sending the pictures to local law officials. Susan also cited property destruction as a problem for engaging in leisure activities. Susan described how:

Our main concern was garbage, so my husband and I photographed what they were leaving behind. This was on public and private land. Garbage is everywhere. It's devastating. My husband had hiked in Arizona for years and had never seen a bottle cap, it was just pristine desert. We should be able to lay down a blanket and have a picnic.

Susan was not the only one who voiced frustration about not being able to enjoy public places for leisure activities. Dan, a member of the New Mexico Rough Riders, and I drove to Sunland Park near Siero De Cristo Rey where the Rio Grande River divides the U.S.-Mexico border. It was a Sunday afternoon, and the park was full of families swimming in the river, eating, and enjoying time together. Dan was horrified that they were all "Mexican" and tells me that "this is not a Sunday spot for Americans." The park looked like any other park in the U.S. on a Sunday afternoon with families enjoying leisure time together. The only difference was that it was populated by Brown Mexicans rather than white Americans.

Erin became involved in the California Coalition for Immigration Reform (CCIR) when she noticed changes in her neighborhood. She described how "what I saw around me, which was that my city, my community, my neighborhood, was suddenly becoming like the third world,

with trash and graffiti everywhere.” Nativist’s activists believe that something has been taken away from them; they have lost the ability to have a middle-class life. Erin explained how:

I grew up in the 1950s. It was a different world. We had a quality of life. If you were middle class, you could buy a house and a car, and everything didn’t cost so much. You could leave your doors unlocked; it was just a different, better world. And now it’s deteriorating.

Erin captures the nostalgia that many nativist’s activists pined for when they compared early twenty-first century America to early decades that they believed to be affordable and crime free for middle-class white Americans.

Molly volunteered in the Scottsdale, Arizona MCDC office and was also involved with United We Stand Arizona (USA). Health problems impeded her ability to do border watches, MCDC’s primary form of nativist activism. Molly was responsible for administrative duties such as “filing paperwork” and making sure that “no sensitive information is available” as well as reading and responding to emails sent to MCDC headquarters. She situated her activism in the context of being a single mother. Her low-income status left her with limited housing choices and she and her son lived in an apartment building in an impoverished area in Phoenix that was populated by Bosnian refugees who were later replaced by immigrants from Mexico.

I started to feel the repercussions of illegal immigration after 9/11. My car was stolen, my son went to the bus stop and there was a dead body on the sidewalk, my son’s school began to decline. The other students didn’t speak English and they were taking up so much time that he was being neglected. We lived there because as a single mom I couldn’t afford anything else.

Molly followed up with how she felt like she and her son were the victims of racism.

I’ve always raised my son not to be racist. Not to judge someone because they are Black or Brown and he couldn’t understand why they were so mean to him when he was never mean to them. We were the subjects of racism. The more the complex became filled with illegals the more we became the target of racism. They started flying Mexican flags out front.

Molly did not give specific examples of how she experienced racism other than feeling as though she “did not belong” when neighbors raised a Mexican flag.

Fred, a member of the Arizona chapter of MCDC, described how he feared for his wife’s safety when immigrants began moving into his community:

My family and I were living in a sleepy little town. It didn’t even have a McDonalds. Everyone was safe. We started having crime and a woman was taken out of a parking lot from a grocery store. There’s a highway with a lot of businesses and that’s where they came in. We were getting overrun. A ten mile stretch where you would think you were in Mexico. This is what got me started on this. My wife totally changed her life as far as going to town. She couldn’t go out in the evenings; she had to go with other people. I got a carry permit for a gun.

Like other nativist activists, Fred holds immigrants accountable as the culprits of increased crime, regardless of whether it was an immigrant committing the crimes he provided as examples.

Samuel, a member of CCIR and the only Black participant in the study emphasized how migration to his neighborhood changed the racial demographic.

Central Avenue, which used to be the main street in Black Los Angeles is no longer Black; it's probably 80% Hispanic. And of those, you're probably talking two-thirds to three-quarters of them are illegal. The Blacks have been pushed out.

Samuel traces the demographic shift to the 1986 amnesty law that he believes caused Hispanics to push out Blacks from the housing market.

I live in the Crenshaw area. Some houses are around \$250 thousand. Those are upper-class Black doctors and lawyers. Somewhere I can't afford to live. I'm just north of that and those houses where I live are around \$150 thousand. What the Hispanics do is they put four or five families in the house. We have a house on my street where there's twenty-two people living in a two-bedroom house. They've got five or six cars in the driveway and more on the street. I don't want to live that way. It's not my culture to live that way. My wife, kids, and I, live in a house. That's how it's meant to be; it's not meant to be a house that size with twenty people in it. There are young Black people in the community now who want to buy a home and they can't. They can't afford it, and the real-estate people will tell you, well, get another family, and buy a house, well, come on, that's ridiculous.

Samuel positioned himself as someone who could not afford to live in the upper-class Black neighborhood, the area that Hispanics had not yet moved into, but the area just north of where the "Black doctors and lawyers" live. In his neighborhood, Hispanics were not only moving into his community but transforming it by overpopulating homes that were intended for two generation nuclear families. Samuel could not afford the area that was populated by upper-middle class Black families. He and other young Black people cannot afford real estate in what had previously been communities for middle-class Black families.

4.2 Work

Changes in the economy that propelled nativist activists into the movement include shifts in agricultural work and working-class jobs, such as construction, that suppress wages and push out Americans, according to nativists, from those employment sectors. Tom, a former U.S. Border Patrol Officer who worked with some of the nativist border groups explained how migration changed over the years regarding those looking for work:

In the late 60s and early 70s, illegal alien traffic was men between the ages of 30-60 and almost exclusively were former Braceros. They were proud to be Braceros. They were a pleasure to work with. They were respectful. They followed orders. They knew the routine. They knew a little English. We're talking about Mexican peasants. Around 1974 the Braceros started bringing their sons and nephews. A lot of the sons and nephews were spoiled brats and then later in the 70s the Braceros stayed home and the

sons brought their girlfriends and wives. Before working for the Border Patrol I worked on ranches and worked in construction. I would encounter wetbacks and didn't have a problem with them. There weren't enough of them to suppress wages. Today the same job that would pay me \$22 an hour pays them \$8 an hour.

Tom is aware of the salary difference between what employers pay U.S. citizens and what they offer undocumented workers. The presence of undocumented workers was not a cause for alarm when Tom was working construction as their numbers were low enough not to adversely affect wages. Once larger numbers of migrants come to the U.S. to work, employers shift to hiring them since the remuneration is less. He also brings out a key aspect of how nativists differentiate immigrants from those who are "respectful" and "follow orders" from those who do not.

Henry, a farmer who took over the family farm when his father passed away and whose property line is at the Rio Grande in McAllen, Texas, also recalled how migration shifted after the Bracero program.

In the 1960s, the Braceros were just hard-working people looking for work. We had 150 people living on our farm. Great people. At my father's funeral, one of the crew members that worked out in the field for thirty years, an elderly lady, came up to me at the funeral and she said, I can't wait until I pass on and get to go to heaven and work for your dad. I thought, now that's the ultimate compliment.

In Henry's recounting of how beloved his father was by his workers, like Tom, he too was nostalgic for the Braceros as they were "hard working people." For Henry, that generation's devotion to work, and as an extension, devotion to their employer, was so great that even in death their desire to continue working determined their worth.

Susan described how when she and her husband first moved in Arizona in the 1980s that the workforce for construction workers was racially diverse "the workers were white, Black and Brown" but that "they spoke English and were Americans. I watched it change from Americans working these jobs to illegals working these jobs." She described how:

My husband had a construction company and we noticed that we were always being underbid by companies that hired \$5 an hour illegal aliens. We paid a living wage, worker's comp [compensation], and paid taxes, so we were out of business because we wouldn't break the law. We have a mortgage and a business truck. What do you do? You go out of business, or you break the law. He went under and went to work for other companies.

Unlike Tom who was working construction before migration from Mexico ballooned, Susan's husband was forced to close his business because he could not compete for contracts when he paid his employees a fair wage.

Samuel's frustration about undocumented migration and work was in the context of Affirmative Action.

Affirmative Action was meant for Black people. We've got people who walk across that border and the day they get here they can get Affirmative Action. It's not fair. Their parents have never struggled in this country, their forefathers never paid any dues, never paid any taxes, supported our institutions, our colleges, our elementary schools, our high schools; they never served in any of the wars to defend this country, so therefore, why are they entitled to Affirmative Action simply because they're Hispanic?

Samuel discussed how the middle-class dream has been ruined by those who take it.

My heart goes out to anybody in Mexico who wants a better life, but you can't come here and just take it. I can't go to Beverly Hills and just take a better life. I have to earn it. I have to work my way up to it. I have to be legal and that's the only way to do it.

Samuel believed that undocumented migrants automatically qualified for programs, such as Affirmative Action, designed to promote racial equality in the workplace that were intended for Black Americans. The contribution of Black Americans through taxes, military service, and activist struggles entitles them to programs such as Affirmative Action. Those who benefit from employment advancement programs without having contributed to the welfare of the country are likened to those who steal. His use of the example of Beverly Hills, a wealthy Los Angeles neighborhood, positions Samuel as someone who cannot afford an upper-class lifestyle that can only be earned through a legal presence in the country.

4.3 Social Services

Many women nativists were critical of migrants' access to social services, such as healthcare, that they argued should be the sole purview of U.S. citizens. In July 2008, I attended a meeting of the Texans for Immigration Reform, an organization that opposes illegal immigration as well as "indiscriminate" legal immigration. During the meeting, members reported on topics such as the rise in the crime rate and the demise of the public education system in Texas caused, they believe, by illegal immigrants. Two women presented on the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution regarding American born children of undocumented immigrants and expressed their opposition to its current interpretation that these children are automatically granted citizenship: "A pregnant woman gets across the border, drops her baby, and we have to pay for it. Illegals want free benefits – Medicare, Medicaid, and subsidized housing – at our expense. Only citizens should receive these benefits. Birthright citizenship does not include illegal aliens; it's a misinterpretation of the law." Like so many nativist activists I have met who are angry that American born children of undocumented immigrants are U.S. citizens – a right that they believe should be reserved exclusively for children whose parents too are U.S. citizens – these women appropriate a discourse of "we" that denotes those who belong to the nation juxtaposed to the silent "they" that represents the noncitizen Other who not only does not belong to the nation but whose presence and actions they argue diminish the rights of those who they deem worthy of citizenship.

Cynthia was a leader of an anti-illegal immigration group in California. She traced her entry into the movement to the early 1990s when she was caring for a disabled World War II veteran whose benefits were denied by the U.S. Social Security Administration. She relayed her shocked reaction to seeing immigrant clients at the local Social Security office the day she accompanied the veteran to inquire about his benefits: "I couldn't believe my eyes; It was like

an international maternity ward. I couldn't understand a word anybody said. There were three windows to check in; one was for Spanish, one was for Asians, and a third for English, only it was closed." Cynthia explained how she inquired about the immigrants and the number of armed guards in the facility to a caseworker who disclosed that illegal immigrants would demand services and often became violent if they "didn't get everything that they were told they could get." Cynthia was livid after meeting with the caseworker and channeled her anger into activism by organizing a group in southern California. She was particularly upset that undocumented immigrants were receiving services that had been denied to a U.S. war veteran: "He laid down his life for his country and was denied SSI [Supplemental Security Income] and the vast majority in that room was here illegally, coming in to get billions of our tax dollars for their food, their housing, their clothing, and free medical care."

Cynthia's family moved to California in 1951 and they lived in Hawthorne from 1958 to 1978. She described what it was like during those years:

It was a beautiful little town, a good place to raise kids, close to the beach and shopping. In the tract where we lived, there was like almost an invisible line, and the street was called Yukon. Everything west of the street, the vast majority, was Caucasian. On the east side of the street was primarily Black Americans with very few Hispanics mixed in with people of Asian descent. My place was really a watering hole for kids. I'd come home from work and the floor was full of sleeping bags with white, Asian, Hispanic, Black, and we never gave any thought about race. My kids did not grow up with prejudice, there was no reason to, nobody thought about it.

Cynthia, like most other nativist activists I interviewed, was adamant that her activism was about "illegal immigrants" and not race. Her anger over the denial of benefits of the war veteran she claimed was rooted in rights that Americans had paid for with their tax dollars and their lives. She offered the example of their multiracial neighborhood, albeit micro-segregated, and embracement of children from all racial groups as evidence that her activism was "not about race."

Maria was born in the United States to parents of Mexican ancestry. She is the only Latina in this study. Like all the people of color in the nativist movement I have met she shunned hyphenated racial-national naming and instead identified as an American and criticized those who appropriate race into their national identity. Maria traced her activism to her role as caretaker of an American citizen who needed social services but was temporarily denied medical benefits. In the late 1980s, Maria's son was in a debilitating car accident that left him with permanent brain damage after he awoke from a coma. Although she and her husband were working and had health insurance, it did not cover the entirety of their son's medical expenses as he required long-term homecare after his release from the hospital. Maria described how she was "prideful" and therefore did not seek government assistance until she had exhausted all other forms of support. According to Maria, she lived in a county in southern California with a large immigrant population and the local Social Security office was overwhelmed with requests from "illegal aliens;" consequently, the paperwork for her son was lost. Although her son was ultimately granted some assistance, it did not cover all his medical expenses. Maria was dismayed that her son – a U.S. citizen – was denied assistance that she believed was given instead to illegal immigrants: "If Richard had been an illegal alien he would have got all the

help that he needed. My husband and I were both working and had insurance, but because we are American citizens we were shortchanged. Being a citizen can hurt you.”

Nancy, a member of MCDC in Arizona, described how her daughter-in-law had to wait to give birth even though she was in labor because when she arrived at the hospital in Tucson all four delivery rooms were full; three of which were “filled with illegals” that Nancy identified as such because they were speaking Spanish.

We saw two of our trauma units close due to the illegals coming into the ward. When they needed a ride they called an ambulance instead of a taxi. My dad’s heart stopped and he sat in the emergency room from 1-7 until he was seen and sitting in that emergency room you saw lots of people who you knew were probably illegal aliens. They would go there for stomach aches. The person in front of us was talking in Spanish and had brought her son there who was very overweight, and she had brought her son there because he didn’t eat his lunch and he was taking up time in there and my dad is sitting in a wheelchair. I said he can’t be exposed to all these sick people; he is on chemotherapy. It’s no longer about people coming here to work. When they started allowing them to get benefits that U.S. citizens got then it got clear to those people. We had taxpayer money going to benefit people who are not U.S. citizens.

Nancy was upset that she and her husband were paying for medical insurance that others are getting for free. She stated that “I am self-employed and don’t have a group plan for insurance. My husband and I, our deductible is \$7,500. If I was a Mexican I could walk into any hospital and never have to pay. That infuriates me.” Nancy also ties taxpayer money to social services such as hospital use and medical care that have become exorbitant for those who are self-employed.

Erin was also angered that undocumented immigrants receive benefits.

If you’re illegal, you’ve got the keys to the gold mine, you got WIC [Women and Infants], you got SSI [Social Security Income], and you got section 8 [housing]. These people come from socialist countries, this is what they expect, you know, this is ridiculous, and they’ve been told, if you get here, you’re home free and here’s all the goodies.

Erin linked socialism to the reason that undocumented migrants might feel entitled to benefits or “goodies” that should only be reserved for citizens.

Tom described how shifts in migration patterns changed the relationship that migrants had with the welfare state.

Back then they were just coming into the country to work and go home. Back then there wasn’t the welfare state, no WIC, no everyone who shows up at a hospital must be treated. Back then if a pregnant Mexican showed up at a hospital we called the Mexican Red Cross to deport her. The hospital will spend thousands on each birth. In Yuma, the Mexican women would come in and a few days before they were going into labor would camp out at the hospital and go into hospital to have the baby. The hospital would call the Border patrol. If the doctor said it would be a few hours before the baby is born we

would write her up and take her to the port of entry at San Luis and we've saved tax payer money. The hospitals along the border are inundated. They can get it for free here, but in Mexico they have to pay for it. They sneak into this country and claim privileges they're not entitled to; they have sacrificed nothing. Why should a person who sneaked across the border last night get all the services that I've spent my life paying for?

Like others, Tom connects paying taxes as the mechanism for deserving the goods and services that the welfare state offers. To take those services without contributing to them is equivalent to theft. Tom echoed Jack's assessment earlier about importing poverty when he stated that "there are six billion people on this planet and one billion live on less than a dollar a day. If we let that one billion in then this country will look like Calcutta."

4.4 Assimilation

Nativist activists are adamant that immigrants should assimilate into American middle-class culture. One of the primary indicators of assimilation is language. Several participants articulated the frustration of not being able to communicate with immigrants who did not speak English. Wanda was a member of numerous nativist groups including the California Coalition for Immigration Reform, Voices of Citizens Together, the precursor to American Patrol, and the California chapter of Ranch Rescue. In the mid-1990s, Wanda's teenage daughter was denied employment at a clothing store at a local mall because she did not speak Spanish which among other reasons that she cited, such as a mass influx of non-English speakers in southern California, compelled her to join the nativist movement.

There was an incident around 1995. I was taking our local paper and I paid for it by mail. One day a woman came to my door. She couldn't speak English, and she had a child with her, a little girl, to speak for her, to ask for the payment for the paper and I said, tell your mommy I paid by mail. And it turns out that it was a scam where they try to get some extra money by coming to your door when you actually paid by mail. I was told by the paper to contact my district person and let them know that there were people coming to the door asking for payment when we aren't supposed to pay at the door. The woman cussed me out and called me a racist because I mentioned this woman doesn't even speak English. I started noticing more and more non-English-speaking people. I thought where are all these people coming from and then I saw a full page add in the LA [Los Angeles] Times put out by Glenn Spencer of the American Patrol talking about the invasion of our country. I said, oh my god, there's other people that have noticed, so I contacted the group and that's how I got involved.

For Wanda, the problem was not that the woman seeking payment was speaking Spanish, but that she could not speak English. For others, speaking Spanish was a signal that white middle-class Americans are in the minority.

Betty, a member of MCDC, discussed how the rise in bilingualism was what brought her into the movement.

Back in the 1990's the telephone books started coming out in Spanish. I walked into Home Depot and looked up and all the signs were in Spanish. I don't even go shopping

unless I have to because it is so irritating and so frustrating to go to Wal-Mart or to the mall, Penny's, Sears, anywhere that we're not surrounded by Spanish speaking people. They have this arrogance about them that is just frustrating, irritating. I would try to go down an aisle and there'd be several Hispanics standing around just blocking the aisle, just standing there speaking Spanish. And they won't move and if you try to go around them, they are just real rude about it.

Betty continued with how different this was from earlier years of living in Midland, Texas.

I've been here since 1953. We had over 1,000 students in my high school and we had very few Hispanics. They pretty much kept to themselves, didn't cause any problems. You never knew they were around really.

Betty was angered by the presence of Spanish speaking people who "blocked" her ability to engage in daily shopping. She was nostalgic for the years when there were so few Hispanics that she hardly took notice of them.

Maria is bilingual and told a story about speaking English in a store primarily patronized by undocumented immigrants.

There was one time I went to a local store with my daughter. She calls out to me and says, 'mom, do you want large or small tomatoes?' Well the whole area just went quiet. You could hear a pin drop. And I said the large and everything's still quiet and she walks up to me real quietly and she says, 'mom, do you notice nobody's speaking,' I said yeah, and she says, 'what's the matter' and I said, they just realized that we're not Mexicans. She goes, 'it feels creepy, let's get out of here.' We just learned to keep away from those kinds of stores. I still go into them because it's fantastic to go shopping there, you know, the meat is cheap, the vegetables are cheap, the fruit is cheap.

Maria's story shows how assimilation is strong for nativist members, even those who speak Spanish. Maria was born in the U.S. and recalled how her father had been a Bracero and raised her to "believe that I am an American." Maria, like other nativist activists, felt it was her right to speak English, even though she is fluent in Spanish. Like Betty, she was frustrated with the ways that language impeded her ability to engage in American consumerism. She said that they learned to stay away from those stores, yet like others who seek affordable goods, continues to patronize them because of the low prices.

Mary, a member of Citizens for Immigration Reform, helped form the group because "we didn't like what we saw illegal immigration was doing to our schools, our health system, our country, and the mindset of people that were coming to our country." She continued by stating that she had read an article in the newspaper that was "written by an illegal or somebody that was pro-illegal because he had an Hispanic surname. He said, 'America belongs to the world.' America does not belong to the world. We have laws. We are a sovereign nation." Mary demonstrates how America is a place where immigrants come to assimilate contrary to the article that claimed that American culture can be appropriated by the world's people who belong to it.

Ted, a member of the Patriots Border Alliance (PBA) in New Mexico articulated his outrage at what he deemed the problems of diversity when immigrants do not assimilate:

What we're seeing in this country I believe is national suicide. I believe that a fool thinks that diversity is our strength. The promise of America was never for people to come here and be diverse. The promise of America was that diverse peoples could come here and unite under common ideals, and we don't do that anymore. When you lose the sense of a country, you've lost the country. I believe that America as we know it, its future is going to be determined on this border.

He continued by talking about how his childhood playmates were from Mexico, but that they were still American.

My playmates were Mexican. We all listened to the same music, watched the same television shows. The culture we shared was a common culture. We were Americans. I went off and when I came back to New Mexico it's not that way anymore. The so-called Hispanic culture has begun to isolate itself away from American culture. We have two very separate cultures here now.

Ted voiced opposition to multiculturalism when he criticized the value of diversity. It is only through assimilation into American culture that immigrants can be Americans. Once ethnic groups "isolate" and establish their own identity they become part of a different culture, according to Ted.

Many lament the changes in American culture such that immigrants no longer want to become American. Erin stated that "people used to come here because they wanted to become Americans, they wanted to be a part of the country, to contribute something to the country." Erin did not understand her own views as racist. She stated that "I work with a woman who's Black. I don't see her as a Black person. I don't think of her or see her that way. I don't see color." Yet Erin was quite clear that she saw color when she talked about how her own racial culture was disappearing. "White culture is erased while everybody else's culture is celebrated. I mention mine and I'm a Nazi." Like other nativist activists, Erin was keenly aware of her white privilege that she believed migrants were to blame for its disappearance.

5.0 DISCUSSION

The first theme, community changes, captures how nativist activists respond to transformations on their property and in their neighborhoods because of migration movements across the U.S.-Mexico border. The Rio Grande Valley sector, where Jack's ranch and Henry's farm are located, has traditionally seen high volumes of migrant crossings. In 2021, that sector had the highest number (459,007) and largest percentage increase (508.7%) of unauthorized migrants than any other sector (Sanchez 2021). The total number of migrant's crossings across all sectors was 1,659,206 (Sanchez 2021). These data capture encounters only and total numbers are likely much higher. Private property owners in the southwestern U.S. are absorbing global migration flows in the millions each year. They use the language of "invasion," but it is migration patterns due to globalization that creates unprecedented flows of migrants from Mexico into the U.S. Rather than direct their frustration at neoliberal policies, the nativists are angry at the migrants who cut fences and leave trash behind that alter the rural landscape.

For nativists living in cities where migrants tend to settle, they discussed crime, housing cost, and demographic shifts that catapulted them into activism. Home ownership rates in the U.S. peaked in 2004 at 69.2% and dropped to 63.7% by 2016 (Statistica 2022). Molly was in the minority of just over 30% of Americans who were forced to rent as she was a single mom and could not afford to buy a home. Reported cases of violent crime were at the highest in 1991 with 758.2 cases per 100,000 population yielding a crime rate of 0.76% (Statistica 2021). By 2007 it had dropped to 471.8 (0.47%) and by 2014 it was at the lowest at 361.6 (0.36%) (Statistica 2021). Molly and Fred stated that high crime associated with immigrants lead them to the movement. Yet crime was decreasing during the first decade of the twenty-first century. Moreover, a study of crime that compared native-born Americans, undocumented migrants, and immigrants in Texas (the only state that collects data on immigration status for those arrested), found that the highest criminal conviction rate is for native-born Americans, followed by undocumented migrants, and then immigrants with a legal presence in the U.S. (Nowrasteh 2020). The conviction rate for undocumented migrants in Texas was 45% below that of native-born Americans indicating that it is citizens, not immigrants, who commit violent crimes (Nowrasteh 2020).

Demographic shifts have changed the racial landscape of the U.S. and states along the border. In 1980, Los Angeles County, where Samuel lived, was 80.3% white, 12.7% Black, and 7% Other (U.S. Census). By 2000 it was 31.7% white, 9.6% Black, 44.7% Hispanic, 12.3% Asian, and 1.7% Other (U.S. Census). In 2020 it was 25.7% white, 7.9% Black, 48.8% Hispanic, 15.1% Asian, and 2.5% Other (U.S. Census). The white and Black population of Los Angeles County was replaced with Hispanic and Asian residents. By 2050, demographic projections are that white Americans in the U.S. will no longer hold a majority (47%), the number of Black Americans will remain constant (13%) with Hispanic (29%) and Asian (9%) populations on the rise (Pew Research Center 2005). These data show how immigration is changing the racial makeup of American society. By the middle of the twenty-first century, white Americans will no longer be the numeric majority. The perceived loss of power that comes from these shifts explains in part why nativist engaged in the activism they did to deter migrants from coming to the U.S.

The second theme, work, gave examples of how nativists voiced their approval of “good” immigrants, like the former Bracero workers, who contribute to society. They do so by working jobs that do not disrupt Americans’ ability to find employment. In 2020, foreign born workers accounted for 17% of the civilian workforce with Hispanics comprising half of that workforce (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2022). Foreign born workers are more likely to engage in several occupations than native-born Americans, including construction – the type of work that Susan and Tom mentioned being adversely affected by. The employment sector with the highest number of undocumented immigrants is agriculture. Foreign born workers make up 86% of all agricultural workers and undocumented migrants account for 45% of all agricultural workers (Rosenbloom 2022). Unlike the migrants who performed agricultural work during the Bracero program who did it as seasonal laborers who returned to Mexico when the crop cycle was complete, migrants today do not return as crossing the border is a costly and dangerous venture.

Affirmative Action programs are one way for racial minorities to secure employment when faced with structural barriers. Samuel discussed how he viewed the purpose of these programs as helping Black Americans. In 2021, the median income per household by race was \$101,418

for Asian families, \$77,999 for White families, \$57,981 for Hispanic families, and \$48,297 for Black families (Semega and Kollar 2021). Samuel's insistence that Black Americans needed programs such as Affirmative Action matches the reality of most Black families as they earn the least across all racial groups.

The third theme, social services, provides examples of how nativist activists view immigrants as a drain on social services that tax-paying Americans provide and are then pushed out of by "undeserving" migrants who abuse them. A study of welfare use-rates showed that immigrants consumed 39% fewer benefits than native-born Americans (Nowrasteh and Orr 2018). Many participants in this study were angered that undocumented immigrants do not contribute to the services they use since they do not pay taxes. This claim is false. In 2016, undocumented immigrants contributed 11.4 billion dollars in sales, excise, personal income, and property taxes (Gee et al 2017).

Access to healthcare in the U.S. is largely driven by insurance coverage. In 2021, 46% of undocumented immigrants, 25% of legal immigrants, and 8% of citizens were uninsured (Kaiser Family Foundation 2022). Without access to healthcare insurance, undocumented migrants are left with few choices, one of which is to use emergency room services even if the health concern does not medically warrant it. In 1986, the U.S. Congress passed the Emergency Medical Treatment & Labor Act (EMTALA) that enables everyone access to emergency medical treatment regardless of ability to pay. Hospital care is billed to the patient, but the care itself is not denied. However, once anyone without health insurance leaves the hospital they are limited to the services they can access. Without insurance coverage many are without routine access to medical care and some have no other choice but an extended hospital stay (Thomas and Pananjady 2021).

Nancy gave an example about the affordability of healthcare insurance and the high cost that she and her husband were responsible for as they were self-employed. Approximately 20% of self-employed workers were uninsured compared to 9.8% for those employed in private or government work (Dobis and Todd 2022). Nancy correctly pointed out that as a self-employed business there are no employer contributions that off-set the cost of health insurance premiums. In this sense, self-employed Americans are twice as likely to go without health insurance. However, it is unemployed workers who have the highest rate of being uninsured at 35.2% (Dobis and Todd 2022).

The fear of losing power to U.S. born children of undocumented immigrants also does not hold up to empirical evidence. These children must be twenty-one years old before they can petition for their parents to become citizens, hardly the instant gratification of benefits that nativist activists fear. The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) of 1996 requires immigrants in deportation proceedings to prove "exceptional and extremely unusual hardship" to specified qualifying relatives who include a U.S. citizen or legal permanent resident spouse, parent, or child. While migrants can argue that their U.S. born children are a reason to remain in the U.S., in practice they are deported even when they do have U.S. born children (Oxford 2015).

The fourth theme, assimilation, focuses on how bilingualism and multiculturalism are viewed as obstacles to assimilation by nativist activists. In 2016, 21.2% of American families spoke a language other than English at home with Spanish being the top of the five most common

languages other than English (Batalova and Alperin 2018). According to the U.S. Census, only 8.3% of the U.S. population speaks English less than “very well” with some counties along the U.S.-Mexico border having concentrations as high as 35.2% (U.S. Census 2020). The anger that participants voiced about language was overwhelmingly from those who were not bilingual. They argued that they wanted immigrants to come to the U.S. and learn English. But the shift in power that they hold is devalued when immigrants speak both Spanish and English and nativist activists only speak English.

While the participants in this study did not embrace the tenets of multiculturalism, they are in the minority among the U.S. population. According to the Pew Center, 61% of Americans view increasing diversity as a positive societal change (Poushter 2019). Globally, the U.S. ranked fifth of the twenty-seven nations surveyed that embraced diversity (Poushter 2019). Among European nations in the study, supporters of right-wing populist parties are less likely to view diversity as a strength (Poushter 2019).

One of the core themes of how nativist activists describe what moved them toward joining a nativist group is that the United States is becoming a “third world country” because of immigrants. Nativists hold immigrants responsible for urban decay and crime. They believe that their neighbourhoods have deteriorated because of immigrants. Nativists argue that immigrants take jobs away from Americans by working for lower wages creating a pool of unemployed and underemployed citizens who otherwise would be willing to do the same work. Nativists are angry that immigrants siphon social services away from deserving citizens. I use these examples to argue that what underlies their outrage is a loss of white privilege. They articulated an explicit dissatisfaction with community changes that they attributed to undocumented immigrants while adamantly disavowing racist ideology. One contribution this article makes is that it shows how demographic changes result in a loss (or perceived loss) of white privilege for some white middle class Americans. Rather than arguing that nativists are motivated solely by racism, which some are, it teases out how a loss of white privilege is instead what fuels their activism? They are not angry because Brown skinned people have moved into their once all white neighbourhood. Nativists are not arguing for a return to racially segregated living spaces. They are angry because they are now the racial minority.

The nativists I interviewed described a clear sense of entitlement to defending what they perceived to be a vanishing way of life for white middle-class Americans. What they failed to acknowledge is how their activism represents and justifies violence by white Americans against immigrants who are Brown and Black. Their singular focus on immigration status as though race does not matter reveals how what nativists truly fear is not an invasion of undocumented immigrants who do not follow protocol for entry into the country, but instead an influx of non-white immigrants who will alter the American racial demographic.

6.0 CONCLUSION

Most of the groups from this study are now defunct. This allows for a retrospective analysis of the historical, social, and economic events that gave rise to nativist activism of the first decade of the twenty-first century. It also provides insight into the right-wing and mainstream anti-immigrant movements that followed in its aftermath. The current anti-immigrant climate in the United States has been touted as an outcome of the Trump Administration’s policies. President Trump’s speech announcing his presidential candidacy lends credence to this argument. When

then presidential candidate Donald Trump warned Americans that Mexican immigrants are criminals, rapists, and bring problematic behaviour such as drugs with them, left-wing groups challenged his rhetoric and rallied around the rights of migrants (Romero 2018). The focus of criticism was on the derogatory language toward Mexican immigrants (Anbinder 2019).

One overlooked dimension to the speech was his emphasis on those who are “the best” when he told the audience that Mexico is “not sending you.” Trump differentiates between “you” – the white middle-class Americans in his audience – and “they” – the poor criminal Mexican immigrants. His warning fuelled the visceral attacks toward immigrants that have continued after his presidential term ended. The perennial cycle of U.S. nativism persists because some white middle-class Americans blame immigrants for the structural changes that altered the class and racial order of American society. The nativists in this study want a nation that is made up predominantly of white middle-class people, to return to an era where their race and class status confers the rights of citizenship that they perceived they have lost, and a society where immigrants come to assimilate and know their place in the American racial order.

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