The Latino Threat

CONSTRUCTING IMMIGRANTS, CITIZENS, AND THE NATION

SECOND EDITION

Leo R. Chavez

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For those generations who came before and made my life possible,
and the generations to come—may their dreams be fulfilled.

And for my wife, Cathy, and my children, Koji and Andrea—
for fulfilling all my dreams.

1 THE LATINO THREAT NARRATIVE

It is time we stopped thinking of our nearest neighbors [Canada and Mexico] as foreigners.

Ronald Reagan

By a psychological and cultural mechanism of association [with 'alien' and 'illegal' undocumented workers] all Latinos are thus declared to have a blemish that brands us with the stigma of being outside the law. We always live with the mark indicating that whether or not we belong in this country is always in question.

Renato Rosaldo

DESPITE RONALD REAGAN'S PLEA for a more civil political discourse,[1] the tone of the public debate over immigration became more alarmist between 1979 and 1999, when the anthropologist Renato Rosaldo commented on the stigma accorded all Latinos,[2] and this trend has continued up the present time.[3] The events of September 11, 2001, heightened a public discourse on the dangers the United States faces in the contemporary world. President George W. Bush developed a general strategy for the national security of the United States while critics focused on the dangers inherent in forging an empire in the modern world.[4] Americans seemed willing to allow the constitutional rights of foreigners and immigrants to be diminished so long as those of citizens appeared to remain intact, a dangerous bargain at best.[5] But if there has been one constant in both pre- and post-9/11 public discourse on national security, it has been the alleged threat to the nation posed by Mexican and other Latin American immigration and the growing number of Americans of Mexican descent in the United States. The themes in this discourse have been so consistent over the last forty years that they could be said to be independent of the current fear of international terrorism. However, the events of 9/11 "raised the stakes" and added a new and urgent argument for confronting all perceived threats to national security, both old and new.

The Latino threat, though old, still has currency in the new, post-9/11 world. Consider Samuel P. Huntington's views expressed in an article in the March–April 2004 issue of *Foreign Policy*. Huntington compared Latinos, especially Mexicans, with earlier waves of European immigrants and found that "unlike past immigrant groups, Mexicans and other Latinos have not assimilated into mainstream U.S. culture, forming instead their own political and linguistic enclaves—from Los Angeles to Miami—and rejecting the Anglo-Protestant values that built the American dream."[6] He also made these assertions: "Demographically, socially, and culturally, the reconquista (re-conquest) of the Southwest United States by Mexican immigrants is well underway"; "In this new era, 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 those immigrants compared to black and white American natives."[7]

Huntington's statements are all the more remarkable given the historical context in which they were made. At the time, the United States was waging war in Iraq, deeply involved in the war on terrorism in Afghanistan, and still searching for Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda operatives worldwide. And yet amidst all these crises, Huntington singled out Latin American, particularly Mexican, immigration as America's most serious challenge. But this threat did not suddenly surface after 9/11; Huntington had raised the alarm a year before the attack on the World Trade Center. In 2000, Huntington wrote in the *American Enterprise*: "The invasion of over 1 million Mexican civilians is a comparable threat [as 1 million Mexican soldiers] to American societal security, and Americans should react against it with comparable vigor. Mexican immigration looms as a unique and disturbing challenge to our cultural integrity, our national identity, and potentially to our future as a country."[8]

Rather than discarding Huntington's rhetorical excesses as bombastic hyperbole, we are better served by attempting to clarify the social and historical context of such pronouncements. How did Mexican immigration, the Mexican-origin population, and Latin American immigration in general come to be perceived as a national security threat in popular discourse? Such ideas do not develop in a vacuum. They emerge from a history of ideas, laws, narratives, myths, and knowledge production in the social sciences, the natural sciences, the media, and the arts. In other words, they exist within a "discourse," a formation or cluster of ideas, images, and practices that construct knowledge of, ways of talking about, and forms of conduct associated with a particular topic, social

activity, or institutional site in society.[9] As Stuart Hall has noted, "These *discursive formations*, as they are known, define what is and is not appropriate in our formulation of, and our practices in relation to, a particular subject or site of social activity; what knowledge is considered useful, relevant and 'true' in that context; and what sorts of persons or 'subjects' embody its characteristics."[10]

Mexico, Mexican immigrants, and the U.S.-born of Mexican origin are the core foci of the Latino Threat Narrative, but the threat is often generalized to all Latin American immigrants and at times to all Latinos in the United States. In the discursive history of Mexican immigration, specific themes of threat emerge, become elaborated, and are often repeated until they attain the ring of truth. This is a story with a number of interwoven plot lines, or narrative themes: the construction of "illegal aliens" as criminals, the Quebec model, the Mexican invasion and *reconquista* (reconquest) of the United States, an unwillingness to learn English and integrate into U.S. society, out-of-control fertility, and threats to national security. An examination of these themes provides the necessary context for understanding the debates over citizenship and immigrants' rights in the United States that are discussed in the following chapters.

CONSTRUCTING THE "ILLEGAL ALIEN"

Restrictions on immigration and citizenship have always been about how we imagine who we are as a people and who we wish to include as part of the nation, whether this is explicitly recognized or not. Underscoring this observation is Mae Ngai's authoritative history, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*, which concentrates on the early twentieth century but illuminates much that is being debated in the early twenty-first century. The immigration reforms of the 1920s created major restrictions in the flow of immigrants, in the process producing hierarchies of people and nationalities. Western and northern Europeans were the desired immigrants, and their movement hither was the goal of the national origins quotas. Southern and eastern Europeans, Asians, Africans, Mexicans, and other Latin Americans were less desirable, even when demand for their labor made their immigration necessary. The 1920s also witnessed a profound new importance placed on the territorial imperative of national borders, which coincided with new techniques of surveillance, the creation of the Border Patrol, and immigrant health examinations. Out of this new order of border control emerged the "illegal aliens," those who bypassed border controls and found ways to enter the country. The large-scale restrictions of the 1924 immigration law "generated illegal immigration

and introduced that problem into the internal spaces of the nation." As Ngai argues, "Immigration restriction produced the illegal alien as a *new legal and political subject*, whose inclusion within the nation was simultaneously a social reality and a legal impossibility—a subject barred from citizenship and without rights."[11]

Mexican immigrants quickly became associated with the term *illegal alien*. According to Ngai, "As numerical restriction assumed primacy in immigration policy, its enforcement aspects—inspection procedures, deportation, the Border Patrol, criminal prosecution, and irregular categories of immigration—created many thousands of illegal Mexican immigrants."[12] However, it was ironic that Mexicans became so closely identified with the term *illegal*, since they were not subject to numerical quotas and were defined as "white," unlike Asians, and thus were not excluded as racially ineligible for citizenship. The "whiteness" of Mexicans was a legal definition that was a by-product of Mexico's signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo at the end of the U.S.-Mexican War. Mexicans living in what was now U.S. territory were allowed to become U.S. citizens, a privilege reserved for "white" immigrants at the time. Despite such legal definitions, Mexicans were still considered "not-white" in the public imagination.[13] Italian immigrants in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had a similar problem. Their racial designation was ambiguous in that they were viewed as undesirable and inferior to earlier waves of northern and western European immigrants, yet Italian "whiteness" in contrast to African, Asian, and Mexican Americans was never in doubt.[14]

Asians and Mexicans became legally racialized ethnic groups.[15] I use *racialized* here to indicate that these are not genetic-based categories of race but, rather, labels that are socially and culturally constructed based on perceived innate or biological differences and imbued with meanings about relative social worth.[16] Asian immigrants were denied a pathway to citizenship, and Mexicans were associated with illegal alien status and subjected to Jim Crow segregation throughout the U.S. Southwest. Legally racialized because of their national origin, Mexican and Asian immigrants found themselves cast as permanently foreign and faced obstacles to their integration into the nation.[17] For example, in 1925, David Starr Jordan, past chancellor of Stanford University and an ardent eugenicist, commented that "the Mexican peon, who for the most part can never be fit for citizenship . . . is giving our stock a far worse dilution than ever came from Europe."[18] As a result, these racial formations produced "alien citizens"—"Asian Americans and Mexican Americans born in the United States with formal U.S. citizenship but who remained alien in the eyes of the nation."[19]

Such perceptions complicated debates over legalization programs for undocumented immigrants at the time. Some believed that undocumented immigrants should be allowed to legalize their status, while others wanted them deported. Not surprisingly, therefore, legalization programs in the early twentieth century were applied unevenly, reflecting hierarchies of nationality and race. At that time, hundreds of thousands of undocumented immigrants, primarily from Europe, were allowed to adjust their status to that of legal immigrants and eventually citizens. Americans viewed as unjust the deportation of ordinary immigrants with homes and families in the United States. Deportation was justifiable for criminals, but not for otherwise law-abiding immigrants who had established roots in the country. This reasoning, however, did not apply to Mexicans, who also desired to adjust their status. They were subject to a different logic that began with the premise of criminality because of their illegal entry into the nation. As Ngai observed, "By contrast [to European undocumented immigrants], walking (or wading) across the border emerged as the quintessential act of illegal immigration, the outermost point in a relativist ordering of illegal immigration."[20] The current opposition to allowing undocumented immigrants to become legal immigrants (the "pathway to citizenship") begins with the same association of illegal entry with criminality, and Mexicans are still the prototypical "illegal aliens."[21]

Also prevalent in the early twentieth century was the belief that providing immigrants with rights, even the equal protection guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment, diminished the value of citizenship.[22] This belief still has currency in contemporary debates over allowing undocumented immigrants access to driver's licenses and publicly funded education, medical care, and housing.[23] To some, such rights and privileges appear as rewards for illegal entry. Rather than rewarding "illegals," public opinion often declares that they should be punished and removed from the country. Thus, for some, universal access to these rights and privileges blurs the line between citizen and noncitizen and thus cheapens citizenship.

The historical lesson is that "illegality" is socially, culturally, and politically constructed.[24] As people move across ever porous national boundaries, their status is determined by policies in those nation-states, not by some essential quality inherent in the migrant's genetic code or personal philosophy of life. Policy makers, using Foucauldian techniques of governmentality, construct

classifications to further bureaucratic control of populations, including, and perhaps most especially, migrants.[25] Being an unauthorized migrant, an "illegal," is a status conferred by the state, and it then becomes written upon the bodies of the migrants themselves because illegality is both produced and experienced. But illegality itself is a status resulting from political decisions made by governmental representatives who could just as well have decided to allow migrants to enter under the sanction of law, as legal immigrants, legal workers, or legal guest workers. The migrants themselves are the same people, whether deemed legal or illegal by their receptive states. What marks the illegal is the receiving state's unwillingness to recognize the conditions that create a demand for labor, most notably falling fertility rates, aging populations, and values that construe certain jobs as "immigrant jobs." As a result, a legal fiction emerges, one that recognizes that *x* number of migrant laborers will be attracted to most of the industrialized nations but also recognizes that politicians will respond to the fears of immigration among their constituents by allowing in far fewer legal immigrants/workers than the actual flow.[26] The surplus could have been allowed to enter legally, but instead the "illegal" entrant is constructed. The total flow, the *x* number of in-migrants, continues, albeit under these constructed categories of legal and illegal migration. What follows is an examination of the condition of illegality, not so much in the actual lives of "illegal aliens" but in the representations of that condition in public discourse.

INVASION, RECONQUEST, AND THE QUEBEC MODEL

Since its formation in the 1920s, the idea that Mexican undocumented immigrants are "criminals" has continued in public discourse, but in the 1970s a new trope was added: Mexican immigration as an invasion of the United States.[27] Over time, the invasion theme evolved, with the elaboration of the notions of a Mexican reconquest of the U.S. Southwest and what I call the Quebec model. In the Quebec model, the Quebecois independence movement among French-speaking Canadians is held up as an example of the threat posed by Spanish-speaking Mexican immigrants and their descendants, who supposedly maintain linguistic and socially separate lives from the rest of U.S. society. These themes are repeated so often that they become a taken-for-granted set of assumptions about the inability and unwillingness of Mexican immigrants and their children, extending for generations, to become part of society. Huntington's observations, above, are among the latest renditions of these assumptions, but as we will see, they build upon a long history of such assertions about the threat of Mexican immigration, Mexican Americans, and Latinos in general.

As legal immigration began to increase after 1965, public anxiety over undocumented immigration was also increasing. Although it was difficult to estimate the actual numbers of unauthorized immigrants in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s, Leonard F. Chapman Jr., then-commissioner of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), publicly announced that alarmingly high numbers (as many as ten to fifteen million or more) of "illegal aliens" were "flooding" into the country at the time.[28]

The media's display of such large numbers carries meanings apart from their mathematical references. Because it is difficult to assess the accuracy of such numbers and what they mean—for example, their relative impact in a nation as large as the United States—such numbers become images. They jump off the page or the television at the reader or viewer, but these numerical images are flat, in that they lack the depth of understanding that comes with historical context, economic explanations, and social science elaboration. Consequently, numbers such as these invoke simplified responses—low/high, good/bad, affirmative/alarmist, assurance/fear—depending upon the prevailing sentiment toward immigration. An assured response to such purportedly large numbers might be that the nation's economy is doing so well that it is attracting and absorbing many eager new workers. However, in this case, at that time, the media's display of these numbers underscored beliefs that there were "too many" undocumented immigrants. Thus, even though these numbers turned out to be exaggerated, the authority of their source—the INS—meant that they entered public discourse as a symbol of alarm.[29]

For example, the December 1974 cover of the *American Legion Magazine* depicted the United States being overrun by "illegal aliens" (Figure 1.1). Most of the cartoon people in the image are Mexicans storming, en masse, across the U.S.-Mexico border, breaking down a sign that reads "USA BORDER" and another one reading "KEEP OUT." Other immigrants are landing by boats along the East Coast, flying in and swimming from the Caribbean, parachuting across the Canadian border, and all of them are converging upon, and inundating, the nation's institutions, most notably welfare, education, housing, jobs, and medical care. Such images were to become more frequent in the nation's magazines over the next three decades, contributing to an increasingly alarmist discourse on Mexican immigration.[30]

The Quebec model first surfaced, ever so subtly, on the cover of the December 13, 1976, issue of *U.S. News and World Report*, which featured the headline "Crisis across the Borders: Meaning to U.S." The cover illustration was a map of North America with two arrows, both beginning in the United States, one

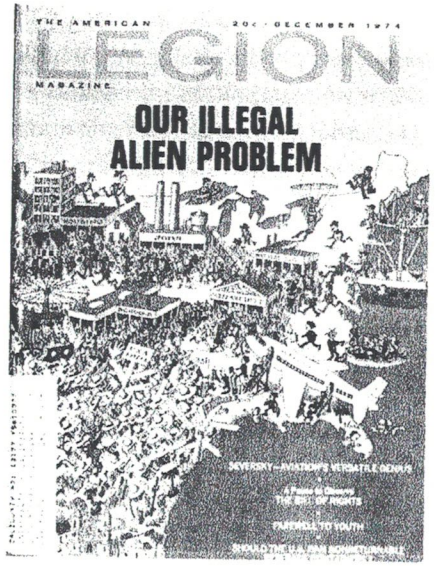

Figure 1.1. Cover of the *American Legion* magazine, December 1974. Illustration by James Flora. © Jim Flora Art LLC. Used by permission.

pointing to Mexico and one pointing to Canada. The crisis in Mexico was the potential for increased migration to the United States. The problem in Canada was Quebec, where many French-speaking residents were pushing for greater sovereignty and even separation from the English-speaking provinces. The Quebec movement was, perhaps, particular to the Canadian context, especially the effect of the 1967 Canadian law concerning bilingualism and biculturalism put into place by Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau.[31] The particularities of the Canadian context undermine the comparison with Mexican immigration's implications for the United States, but, as we will see, the Quebec independence movement came to serve as a metaphor, or civics lesson, for the threat of national division inherent in the "Mexican problem."

The invasion theme continued to be represented in the nation's magazines for the next three decades. The April 25, 1977, issue of *U.S. News and World Report* featured the cover headline: "Border Crisis: Illegal Aliens Out of Control?" The specific "out of control" behavior was clarified in the accompanying article as Mexican immigrants' use of welfare and medical services, displacing citizens from jobs, and turning to crime, all of which threatened the economic security of the nation. The article also referred to Mexican immigrants as "invaders" and asserted that the "U.S. has lost control of its borders" (p. 33).

On January 29, 1979, the same magazine published yet another cover on the "invasion," with the headline "Illegal Aliens: Invasion Out of Control?" The magazine notes that "up to 12 million" undocumented immigrants might have been in the United States at the time and that by the year 2025 they could account for 10 percent of the population. The negative implications of undocumented immigration raised by the magazine included displacing U.S. citizens from jobs, use of welfare, and crime. But even more important was the internal threat posed by the children of immigrants, an idea that is central to the reconquest theme and the Quebec model. Labor secretary Ray Marshall was quoted as saying that illegal immigration "sows the seeds of a bitter civil-rights struggle in the 1990s by the children of today's illegal aliens" (p. 41). The magazine story asserted that the threat was magnified because "the traditions of Mexican Americans remain undiluted, refreshed daily by an influx of illegal immigrants from the mother country" (p. 42). "Undiluted traditions" was another way of saying that Mexican Americans did not assimilate into American society and culture. They remained separate and apart—so separate and apart, in fact, that there was no mixture, no dilution. Characterizing Mexican Americans as foreigners who remain foreign (undiluted) gave added urgency to the invasion metaphor of the article and the cover.

The 1980s witnessed continued repetition of the invasion theme and an elaboration of the Quebec model. *U.S. News and World Report*'s issue of March 9, 1981, featured an illustrated map of the North American continent, including Mexico. The United States was the focal point of the map, and the stars and stripes of the U.S. flag covered it. To the north was Canada, with the image of a Mountie holding the Canadian flag and a French Canadian holding the Quebec flag in one hand and raising his other hand in a defiant, closed-fisted gesture toward the Mountie. To the south was Mexico, where a line of men emerged from the mountains and walked single file toward California. The man in front had his left foot ready to step on the red and white of California, at about San Diego. The headline read "Our Troubled Neighbors—Dangers for U.S." The Quebec "problem," the magazine made clear, was a model for what was prophesied to become the Mexican "problem," a reconquest of the United States.

The reconquest theme was reiterated in the early 1980s. *Time*'s June 13, 1983, issue featured an article on Los Angeles titled "The New Ellis Island." *Time* warned its readers that "Los Angeles is being invaded" (p. 18); that "the statistical evidence of the immigrant tide is stark" (p. 19); and that there was a "staggering influx of foreign settlers" (p. 20). Immigration, according to the magazine, had caused dramatic changes in the ethnic composition of Los Angeles. But *Time*

singled out Mexicans, who, because the Southwest was once part of Mexico, arrived "feeling as much like a migrant as an immigrant, not an illegal alien but a *reconquistador*," or reconqueror (p. 24).

The now fully elaborated triple threat of invasion, reconquest, and a Quebec-like separatist movement soon took on even greater currency in public discourse. *U.S. News and World Report*'s cover on March 7, 1983, announced: "Invasion from Mexico: It Just Keeps Growing." And in the April 1, 1985, edition of the *New Republic*, House majority leader Jim Wright worried about "a Balkanization of American society into little subcultures" (p. 25). In that same issue, Richard Lamm, the ex-governor of Colorado, feared that immigration would result in "a vast cultural separatism" and that the children of Latino immigrants would not grow up as loyal Americans but might instead lead "secessionist" riots in the Southwest to "express their outrage at this country" (p. 25).

The reconquest and separatist inclinations of Mexican immigrants and their offspring were also the theme of the August 19, 1985, cover of *U.S. News and World Report*, which announced: "The Disappearing Border: Will the Mexican Migration Create a New Nation?" The accompanying article, titled "The Disappearing Border," stated the "reconquest" theme as if it were a fact, with little need of supporting empirical evidence:

> Now sounds the march of new conquistadors in the American Southwest. The heirs of Cortés and Coronado are rising again in the land their forebears took from the Indians and lost to the Americans. By might of numbers and strength of culture, Hispanics are changing the politics, economy and language in the U.S. states that border Mexico. Their movement is, despite its quiet and largely peaceful nature, both an invasion and a revolt. At the vanguard are those born here, whose roots are generations deep, who long endured Anglo dominance and rule and who are ascending within the U.S. system to take power they consider their birthright. Behind them comes an unstoppable mass—their kin from below the border who also claim ancestral homelands in the Southwest, which was the northern half of Mexico until the U.S. took it away in the mid-1800s. Like conquistadors of centuries past, they come in quest of fabled cities of gold. America's riches are pulling people all along the continent's Hispanic horn on a great migration to the place they call El Norte. (p. 30)

Importantly, in the *U.S. News and World Report* narrative of invasion and reconquest, it was not just recent Mexican immigrants who posed a threat but even those Americans who were descended from the first Spanish-speaking

explorers of the Southwest. Not even 400 years of living in the Southwest, and over 150 years of that period as U.S. citizens, reduced the threat posed by Latinos (note the quote's reference to Hispanics, not Mexican Americans) in the Southwest. Apparently, according to this argument, they had remained socially and linguistically separate, biding their time for a "revolt" and takeover. In other words, the conspiracy for the reconquest of the Southwest had been in operation for generations and spanned centuries. That so far-fetched and unsupported a scenario could be seriously presented in a national magazine attests to how deeply the taken-for-granted assumptions about invasion and reconquest had, by this point, entered into public discourse. No critical perspective on the assumption of difference was put forward here, a difference so great and incommensurable that the people so designated were not even subject to the normal expectations of social and cultural change.[32] It was as if Mexican Americans and other Latinos existed in an ahistorical space apart from the life that took place all around them. They were cast as "alien-citizens," perpetual foreigners with divided allegiances despite being U.S. citizens by birth, even after many generations.[33] Such notions became an acceptable part of public discourse even among otherwise learned scholars.

Indeed, during the 1990s, the Mexican invasion and reconquest were at the heart of a veritable publishing industry that emerged, playing on the public's fears of immigration. Among the many books on the topic that have appeared since the early 1990s are Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr.'s *Disuniting of America*; Peter Brimelow's *Alien Nation*; Georgie Anne Geyer's *Americans No More*; Patrick J. Buchanan's *Death of the West: How Dying Populations and Immigrant Invasions Imperil Our Country and Civilization*; Victor Davis Hanson's *Mexifornia: A State of Becoming*; Samuel Huntington's *Who We Are: The Challenges to America's National Identity*; Tom Tancredo's *In Mortal Danger*; Jim Gilchrist and Jerome R. Corsi's *The Minutemen: The Battle to Secure America's Borders*; and Patrick Buchanan's second book on the topic, *State of Emergency: The Third World Invasion and Conquest of America*. These works often explicitly refer to the Mexican invasion, the Quebec model, and the Mexican reconquest of the U.S. Southwest.

Schlesinger's *Disuniting of America* was an important contribution to the literature on the threat of immigration to the nation. Here was the archetypical Harvard liberal intellectual raising the alarm about the social separatism caused by bilingual education, the cult of ethnicity promoted by multiculturalists, and the disintegrative effects that would occur if immigrants and their offspring

did not assimilate. He also cited the example of Canada (the Quebec model) and its inability to make a federal multiethnic state work. Schlesinger's observations were not entirely novel, but they carried great weight, and his ideas were echoed in the writings of many other authors, including those mentioned below. He was also the first of three prominent professors, the others being Samuel Huntington and David Kennedy, who warned of the disuniting potential of Latin American immigrants, especially from Mexico.

In 1994 Patrick Buchanan, a nationally recognized conservative politician, expressed his deep concern that a Quebec-like threat loomed large in America's future. In an opinion article in the *Los Angeles Times*, Buchanan reasoned that sometime in the near future the majority of Americans would trace their roots not to Europe but to Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Middle East, and the Pacific islands.[34] He thus asked: What would it mean for "America" if, for example, South Texas and Southern California became almost exclusively Latino? He provided the following answer: "Each will have tens of millions of people whose linguistic, historic and cultural roots are in Mexico," and thus, "like Eastern Ukraine, where 10 million Russian-speaking 'Ukrainians' now look impatiently to Moscow, not Kiev, as their cultural capital, America could see, in a decade, demands for Quebec-like status for Southern California."[35] For Buchanan, Latino immigrants and their children posed the risk of a separatist movement, which would very likely seek to take over U.S. territory and return it to Mexico's control.

In *Alien Nation*, Peter Brimelow argued that Hispanics were particularly troublesome, going so far as to claim that they were "symptomatic of the American Anti-Idea," an idea that is neither defined nor clarified.[36] But Brimelow leaves no doubt what he means: "Symptomatic of the American Anti-Idea is the emergence of a strange anti-nation inside the U.S.—the so-called 'Hispanics.'" The growth of an anti-nation inside the nation is a way of retelling the threat characterized by the Quebec model. In this case, in addition to Hispanic population growth, Brimelow asserted that the various groups of people lumped together as "Hispanics" had, in effect, an artificial identity because of their differences. But because U.S. government agencies treated them as a homogenous "protected class" and encouraged bilingualism and the teaching of Spanish, Hispanics were now much less encouraged to assimilate to American culture. "In effect," Brimelow noted, "Spanish-speakers are still being encouraged to assimilate. But not to America."[37]

In *Americans No More*, Georgie Anne Geyer argued that excessive immigration, especially unauthorized immigration, and the rights accorded immigrants were diluting the meaning of U.S. citizenship. Mexicans, in particular, posed a threat to California, and thus the nation, because their "high" birth rates were changing the demographic and political landscape. Geyer worried that "illegal aliens, with no commitment to the country and no respect for its common principles," were forming "their own political power groups to challenge the old citizens' America."[38] In her version of events, reconquest through reproduction would lead to disastrous demographic and political changes: "By the end of the 20th century, America itself had changed—it was in danger of drifting toward becoming a Third World nation, and crucially important parts of it, like once-glorious California, were actually moving backwards in time and backwards in development."[39]

In November 1996 the eminent Stanford historian David M. Kennedy wrote in the *Atlantic Monthly* about the Quebec model and "the Reconquista."[40] Despite the seeming interdependence between Mexico and the United States, Kennedy argued that Mexican immigration did not follow the pattern of pluralism supposedly exhibited by European immigrants. Mexicans were from a single cultural, linguistic, religious, and national source, and they concentrated in one geographical region, the Southwest. The United States, according to Kennedy, had had no experience comparable to this regional concentration of Mexican Americans. According to Kennedy, the possibilities of this trend were that Mexican Americans could, if they chose to do so, "preserve their distinctive culture indefinitely":

> They can challenge the existing cultural, political, legal, commercial, and educational systems to change fundamentally not only the language but also the very institutions in which they do business. . . . In the process, Americans could be pitched into a soul-searching redefinition of fundamental ideas such as the meaning of citizenship and national identity. . . . If we seek historical guidance, the closest example we have at hand is in the diagonally opposite corner of the North American continent, in Quebec. The possibility looms, that in the next generation or so we will see a kind of Chicano Quebec take shape in the American Southwest, as a group emerges with strong cultural cohesiveness and sufficient economic and political strength to insist on changes in the overall society's ways of organizing itself and conducting its affairs.[41]

By using the word "Chicano," Kennedy was expanding the threat to include U.S.-born Mexican Americans, who, in this scenario, would maintain a distinctive culture and language "indefinitely." The heretical idea that U.S.-born Chicanos were steeped in U.S. culture and spoke English was not a part of the scenario—otherwise where would be the threat? Kennedy simply assumed that U.S.-born Chicanos had so little social, cultural, political, or economic capital in U.S. society that they would want to form a separate country. Otherwise, if these "truths" were not self-evident, proof of a reconquest conspiracy and proof of Latino unwillingness to integrate socially and culturally would have to be provided in no uncertain detail. But because these taken-for-granted truths were self-evident, merely invoking the Quebec example served as ample evidence that a certifiable Latino threat existed.

Douglas S. Massey and Karen A. Pren also found an increase in alarmist rhetoric and imagery in their analysis of the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *Los Angeles Times* between 1965 and 1995. They searched for the words "undocumented," "illegal," or "unauthorized" paired with "Mexico" or "Mexican immigrants" and the words "crisis," "flood," or "invasion." Massey and Pren found that "the use of the negative metaphors to describe Mexican immigration was virtually nonexistent in 1965, at least in major newspapers, but thereafter rose steadily, slowly at first and then rapidly during the 1970s to reach a peak in the late 1970s, roughly at the same time illegal migration itself peaked."[42] They attributed the increase in negative rhetoric to politicians, who discovered the advantages of raising fears about Latino immigrants and illegal immigration, and to the media's realization of how much could be gained through continued use of verbal and visual images of the border under siege.

It must be noted that not all public discourse on immigration was alarmist, especially during the latter half of the 1990s, which experienced an economic boom. With low unemployment rates and significant job growth, suddenly immigrant labor was in demand. It was as if Ross Perot's warning of a "giant sucking sound" finally took place, except the jobs created were in the United States and not in Mexico, as he predicted would occur as a result of the North American Free Trade Agreement of 1994. So many undocumented workers were drawn to jobs in the United States that about 8.8 million were estimated to be there in 2000 and 10.3 million in 2004.[43] Moreover, the expanding economy created a hyper-demand for immigrant labor that pulled Mexican immigrants to ever more "exotic" locations in the Midwest and the southeastern United States,

including North Carolina, Tennessee, Mississippi, Arkansas, and Georgia.[44] It was also perhaps due to economic expansion and the need for immigrant labor that alarmist public discourse was superseded, if only for a few years, by more moderate views on immigration. George Will, in *Newsweek*, argued that today's immigrants, including Mexicans, were no different from Italians and other earlier waves of immigrants.[45] The AFL-CIO suddenly changed its policy to one that favored legalizing and unionizing undocumented immigrants.[46] Federal Reserve chairman Alan Greenspan noted that immigrants were good for the economy.[47] And George W. Bush, shortly after assuming the presidency in 2001, put forward an ambitious immigration reform plan that would have legalized Mexican undocumented immigrants and created a new guest worker program for Mexican workers.[48] Negative reactions to Bush's proposals dredged up the reconquest theme, as evidenced by a cartoon of the U.S. president with Mexico's president, Vicente Fox (Figure 1.2).

Time magazine's June 11, 2001, cover image illustrated just how subtly the idea of reconquest, or a Mexican takeover of the United States, could be evoked (Figure 1.3). Here were two smiling Latino children dressed like American children anywhere might be dressed. Although the image of the children might have evoked a sense of pleasantness, the text raised an alarm about Mexican immigration: "Welcome to Amexica: The border is vanishing before our eyes, creating a new world for all of us." Because the term *Amexica*, made up by

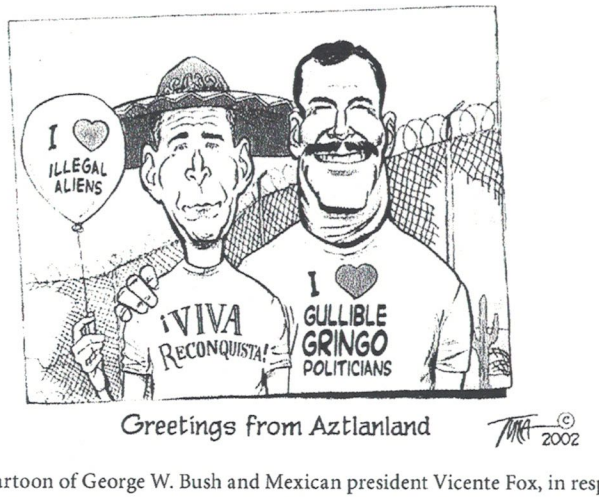

Figure 1.2. Cartoon of George W. Bush and Mexican president Vicente Fox, in response to Bush's immigration reform proposals, by Rick Tuma. Courtesy of CNSNews.com.

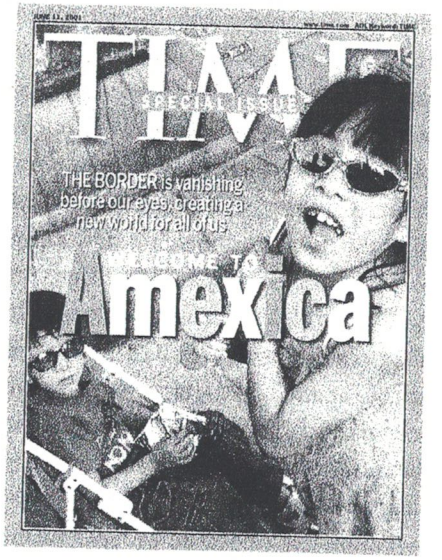

Figure 1.3. Cover of *Time*, June 11, 2001. © 2007 Time Inc. Reprinted courtesy of the editors of Time Magazine.

blending parts of the words *America* and *Mexico*, was framed by the "vanishing border" statement, it was Mexico that was intruding on America, slowly taking it over or obliterating it. Colors were used to reinforce the message; the letters are in red, white, and blue, except the *C*, which is in green, a key color of the Mexican flag. Suddenly the rather pleasant-looking children were revealed as part of a reconquest of America, which was occurring because the "vanishing border" was letting them, and others like them, into the country, thereby creating a "new world."

POST-9/11 AMERICA

In the wake of the tragedy of September 11, 2001, the U.S.-Mexico border became associated with a new threat, the gateway through which possible terrorists might enter.[49] On January 25, 2002, President Bush released a statement from the White House, *Securing America's Borders Fact Sheet: Border Security*: "America requires a border management system that keeps pace with expanding trade while protecting the United States and its territories from threats of terrorist attack, illegal immigration, illegal drugs, and other contraband." *Time* magazine's cover for September 20, 2004, showed the U.S. flag being torn apart

by two light-brown hands. The text stated: "Special Investigation—America's Border: Even after 9/11, it's outrageously easy to sneak in." In this image, the flag represented both the fabric of the nation, which was being torn apart, and the border between safety and terrorists trying to enter the country. The implicit message was that this shredding of the nation's border and the flag must be stopped.

The new threat of terrorism resulted in calls for controlling the border as a means of improving homeland security. As Mark Krikorian, executive director of the Center for Immigration Studies, put it: "Blocking the enemy's ability to enter our country must be a central objective of homeland security."[50] That none of the terrorists involved in the 9/11 carnage crossed the U.S.-Mexico border illegally was beside the point. Post-9/11 concerns with "the terrorist threat" and national security resulted in greatly increased funding for border surveillance and control, including passage of a bill to build a seven-hundred-mile fence along the U.S.-Mexico border. Despite the added urgency of the new terrorist threat, the old triple threat posed by Mexican immigration has continued to play a key role in public discourse on immigration after 9/11.

Not long after 9/11, Patrick J. Buchanan's book *The Death of the West* was published. The book's subtitle laid bare the author's perspective: *How Dying Populations and Immigrant Invasions Imperil Our Country and Civilization*. In a chapter titled "La Reconquista," Buchanan continued arguments he had published in the *Los Angeles Times* almost a decade earlier. Not only was the Mexican population in the United States growing rapidly, but there was also the problem of assimilation: "Mexicans not only come from another culture, but millions are of another race. History and experience teach us that different races are far more difficult to assimilate" (p. 125). So this "Mexican race" had difficulty assimilating for reasons that were biological, what Buchanan perceived as their inherent difference. This racial problem was different from a supposed lack of desire to assimilate, which was cultural. But Buchanan added this to the mix as well:

> Unlike the immigrants of old . . . [m]illions of [Mexicans] have no desire to learn English or to become citizens. America is not their home; Mexico is; and they wish to remain proud Mexicans. They have come here to work. Rather than assimilate, they create Little Tijuanas in U.S. cities. . . . With their own radio and TV stations, newspapers, films, and magazines, the Mexican Americans are creating an Hispanic culture separate and apart from America's larger culture. They are becoming a nation within a nation. (pp. 125–26)

Notice how quickly and easily Buchanan's focus on immigrants had expanded to include their children, and even later generations of Mexican Americans, who were creating a separate culture and nation. A few pages later, Buchanan put forward the Quebec model as the "predictable" future of California: "America's largest state is on its way to becoming a predominantly Third World state. No one knows how this will play out, but California could become another Quebec, with demands for formal recognition of its separate and unique Hispanic culture and identity" (p. 140).

Victor Davis Hanson published *Mexifornia: A State of Becoming* in 2003. Hanson, a fifth-generation Californian from a farming family, lamented for times gone by, for the good old days when "the offspring of Selma's immigrant farmers learned English, they intermarried, and within a generation they knew nothing of the old country and little of the old language":

> Now Selma is an edge city on the freeway of somewhere near twenty thousand anonymous souls, and is expanding at an unclenched pace, almost entirely because of massive and mostly illegal immigration from a single country: Mexico. . . . I was deeply attached to the old town, now vanished. It was by no means perfect, but it was a society of laws and customs, not a frontier town like the current one, in which thousands reside illegally, have no lawful documentation, and assume that Selma must adapt to their ways, not the reverse. (p. 2)

Hanson found that in America today schools were not interested in assimilating immigrants and their children. He deplored the "identity politics" of Chicano studies programs. He believed that the children of Mexican immigrants lacked an interest in becoming part of U.S. society, which led to their dropping out of school, becoming gang members, and causing problems. Compounding the problem, as Hanson saw it, was that Mexican immigrant families adhered to a culture that stressed having many children.

Both Hanson and Buchanan pointed to the cultural politics of Chicano studies programs and professors and to the student organization MEChA (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán), a college student organization, for perpetuating an ideology that claims the U.S. Southwest as Aztlán, the mythical homeland of the Aztecs. This so-called ideology of Aztlán became fused with the Quebec model in public discourse surrounding the 2003 race for governor of California. Cruz Bustamante, the lieutenant governor, ran against actor Arnold Schwarzenegger and Schwarzenegger won. One of the key issues raised about Bustamante was his participation in MEChA when he was an

undergraduate student.[51] Opponents characterized MEChA, and thus Bustamante by association, as an organization that advocated the Chicano takeover of the American Southwest because it was once Aztlán and thus rightfully theirs.[52] An image that appeared on the September 5–11, 2003, cover of the *OC Weekly*, published in California's Orange County, satirically represented Bustamante as an Aztec warrior, a representation the magazine was critiquing, not advocating. The illustration had Bustamante wearing an eagle headdress complete with large feathers and large Aztec earplugs, as he stared off into space. The text read: "Fear of a Brown Planet: Cruz Bustamante Rises, Conservatives Freak Out." Thus, Cruz Bustamante, despite his protestations, had become an Aztec warrior, a separatist, a member of the "Brown Klan," and a militant intent on "reconquering" the American Southwest.

Business Week's March 15, 2004, issue raised the possibility that a separate Hispanic nation might emerge within the United States. The bold headline on the issue's cover visibly shouted "Hispanic Nation," followed by "Hispanics are an immigrant group like no other. Their huge numbers are changing old ideas about assimilation. Is America ready?" (Figure 1.4). Also included on the cover was a photograph of a Latino family that stood in ironic opposition to

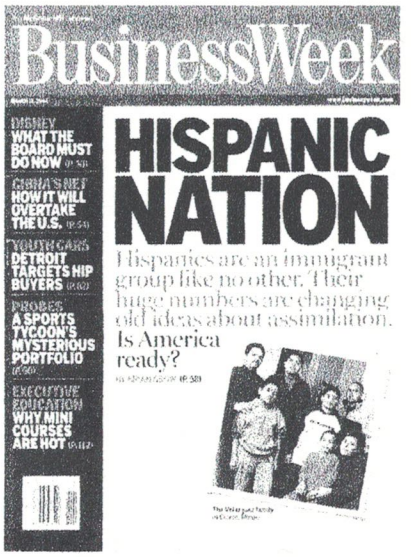

Figure 1.4. Cover of March 15, 2004, edition of *Business Week*. Reprinted by permission. Copyright 2004 by The McGraw-Hill Companies.

the cover's text; the family's dress suggested that they were solidly middle class and the caption noted that they lived in Cicero, Illinois, outside the traditional areas of concentration for the Latino population—California, Texas, Florida, and New York.

Despite this visual incongruity, the cover's text represented the Latino population as unique in contrast to other immigrant groups, who did not form separate independent nations in the United States and for whom assimilation was, supposedly, a smooth and linear process. Assimilation for other immigrant groups, historically and today, has been set up as a banner example of the "old ideas about assimilation." We can only assume that the Hispanics that were the subject of *Business Week*'s 2004 cover were changing these old ideas in ways that reflected not assimilation but rather the social, cultural, and linguistic separatism that would result in a separate nation. In other words, *Business Week* offered yet another rendition of the Quebec model.

That same year, Samuel Huntington published *Who We Are: Challenges to America's National Identity*, which focused on the threat of Mexican immigration. He repeated the problems with Mexican immigration found in the quotes at the beginning of this chapter. He spoke of a Mexican *reconquista*, a blurring of the border between Mexico and the United States, and the problem of a blending of cultures (p. 221). This was happening, according to Huntington, because "Mexican immigrants and their progeny have not assimilated into American society as other immigrants did in the past and as many other immigrants are doing now" (p. 222). He asserted that the areas where Mexican immigrants and their children were not assimilating were in use of English, educational attainment, occupation and incomes, and intermarriage, adding: "If this trend continues, it could produce a consolidation of the Mexican-dominant areas into an autonomous, culturally and linguistically distinct, economically self-reliant bloc within the United States" (p. 247). In short, as in the Quebec model, the *reconquista* would lead to the formation of a separate nation (p. 230).

Appearing in 2006 was Patrick J. Buchanan's second book on the topic, *State of Emergency: The Third World Invasion and Conquest of America*. With chapters titled "The Invasion," "The Aztlán Plot," and "The Return to Tribalism," Buchanan's message that a Mexican invasion was taking place was apparent. Speaking of the *reconquista*, however, Buchanan added a novel twist of transnational conspiracy to the retelling: for over a decade Mexico and its president, Vicente Fox, had pursued a strategy that "aims directly at a reannexation of the Southwest, not militarily, but ethnically, linguistically, and culturally, through

transfer of millions of Mexicans into the United States and a migration of 'Anglos' out of the lands Mexico lost in 1848" (p. 125). Buchanan noted, "In California, the project is well advanced. As native-born Californians depart, Hispanics move toward dominance. As Mexicans come in the millions—one in six is already here—they are urged to seek U.S. citizenship to advance the agenda of the mother country" (p. 125). Later, he explained a bit more about how the takeover would occur: "*La Reconquista* is not to be accomplished by force of arms, as was the U.S. annexation of the Southwest and California in 1848. It is to be carried out by a nonviolent invasion and cultural transformation of that huge slice of America into a Mexamerican borderland" (p. 132).

Also in 2006, Jim Gilchrist, the founder of the Minuteman Project, and Jerome R. Corsi published *Minutemen: The Battle to Secure America's Borders*. Although the book was as much about Jim Gilchrist and the Minuteman Project as it was about undocumented immigration, it reiterated the Mexican invasion theme in a chapter titled "The Trojan Horse Invasion," and the reconquest theme in a chapter titled "The *Reconquista* Movement: Mexico's Plan for the American Southwest."

On May 11, 2010, Arizona governor Jan Brewer signed the state's law on ethnic studies, known as HB 2281. The law reflects the perceived threat of Latinos and their alleged *reconquista* of the U.S. Southwest. As the law states, "A school district or charter school in this state shall not include in its program of instruction any courses or classes that include any of the following: 1. Promote the overthrow of the United States government."[53] Anti-immigrant proponents such as John Huppenthal, Arizona's superintendent of public instruction, decided that Mexican American studies programs in Arizona's high schools promoted a takeover of the United States despite the lack of evidence supporting such a claim. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, a report undertaken by Huppenthal's own office actually found no such evidence but did find that the classes promoted ethnic and racial tolerance and increased positive school performance.[54] Nevertheless, the pervasiveness and taken-for-granted assumptions of the Latino Threat Narrative overwhelmed opposition to the school board's actions.

In 2011, Patrick J. Buchanan published his third book warning of America's impending doom: *Suicide of a Superpower: Will America Survive to 2025?* Buchanan notes that recent Mexican presidents have declared that the Mexican nation (people) extends into the United States (pp. 138–39). He also sees evidence of a conspiracy to take over the United States in Mexico's dual nationality

laws. He claims Mexico is constructing a Mexican nation inside the United States, where U.S. citizens of Mexican birth and ancestry place loyalty to Mexico before allegiance to the United States (p. 138). Buchanan then returns to his oft-stated point: "Not only is our melting pot cracked, it has been repudiated in favor of multiculturalism. Immigrants are urged to keep their language, customs, traditions, culture, and national identity. And the largest cohort comes from a country, Mexico" (p. 142). The problem with Buchanan's ad hominen argument about the threat to the nation posed even by citizen Latinos is that there is no evidence to support their alleged lack of allegiance to the United States nor information on changing language use and related cultural behaviors.

In May 2012, the U.S. Justice Department sued Sheriff Joe Arpaio of Maricopa County in Arizona for "racially profiling Latinos, abusing them in his jails and retaliating against his critics."[55] These alleged unconstitutional behaviors on Sheriff Arpaio's part were directed against Latino citizens and immigrants alike. Arpaio has achieved a level of notoriety rarely bestowed on a county sheriff. But for Sheriff Joe, being hailed as "America's Toughest Sheriff" harkens back to the exploits of earlier western lawmen, such as Wyatt Earp, Bat Masterson, and Pat Garrett. Why is the sheriff so tough on Latinos? His 2008 book (co-authored by Len Sherman), *Joe's Law: America's Toughest Sheriff Takes on Illegal Immigration, Drugs, and Everything Else That Threatens America*, offers a clue. Latinos threaten America, he writes, because they are not like his own Italian immigrant parents, who did not view America as somehow once belonging to Italy. For Latinos: "A growing movement among not only Mexican nationals but also some Mexican-Americans contends that the United States stole the territory that is now California, Arizona, and Texas, for a start, and that massive immigration over the border will speed and guarantee the *reconquista* of these lands, returning them to Mexico" (p. 48).

THE LATINO THREAT NARRATIVE AS DISCOURSE

Perhaps it is only by becoming aware of the mind-numbing repetition glimpsed in the examples above that we can get a true sense of the degree to which the narratives of invasion, reconquest, and the Quebec model have become taken-for-granted assumptions about the threat posed by Mexican immigrants, by Mexican Americans with multiple generations in the United States, and at times by all Latinos. Although more could have been included, those presented above are enough to demonstrate that the pattern has been established. The discourse of these pundits, authors, and scholars is unified in its representations of

Latinos, especially Mexican immigrants and their descendants, as people who will not and cannot become part of U.S. society. The Latino Threat Narrative, as a discourse, is an example of Michel Foucault's notions of knowledge and power. The objects of this discourse are represented as the Other and as a "threat" and "danger" to the nation through such simple binaries as citizen/foreigner, real Americans / "Mexicans" or real Americans / "Hispanics," natives/enemies, us/them, and legitimate/illegal. Once constructed in this way, Mexican and other Latin American immigrants, and even U.S.-born Latinos, can then be represented as "space invaders"—as Nirmal Puwar has put it—whose reproduction, both social and biological, threatens to destroy the nation's identity.[56]

What I am getting at might better be understood in relation to Antonio Gramsci's notions of hegemony and common sense.[57] Hegemony is the system of values, attitudes, morality, and other beliefs that passively or actively support the established order and thus the class interests that dominate it. Common sense is the largely unconscious and uncritical way of perceiving the world that is widespread in any given historical epoch. Common sense incorporates within it the prevailing consciousness, or hegemony, that is largely internalized and taken for granted by members of society.

The Latino Threat Narrative works so well and is so pervasive precisely because its basic premises are taken for granted as true. In this narrative, Latinos, whether immigrant or U.S.-born, are a homogenous population that somehow stands apart from normal processes of historical change. They are immutable and impervious to the influences of the larger society and thus are not characterized as experiencing social and cultural change. They are uneducated, monolingual Spanish speakers, segregated into ethnic enclaves. Because they lead separate social and linguistic lives, one must assume that they marry only their own kind. They are locked into Catholic doctrine, leading to high fertility rates. In this narrative, Latinos, especially Mexican immigrants and their children, are seldom represented as agents of positive change, because their unwillingness to integrate denies them the opportunity to influence the larger society in any appreciable way, except in the negative—as a threat to existing institutions (e.g., education, social services, medical). In other words, the Latino Threat Narrative posits a neo-evolutionary scenario but in reverse, the devolution of society. Because of these characteristics, Latinos, especially those of Mexican origin, are said to be outside the practices of citizenship/subject-making and incapable of feelings of belonging.[58] In this way, the Latino Threat Narrative constructs distinctions between citizens and noncitizens, elaborating

a segmented citizenship in which some members of society are valued above others. Such differences, once constructed and normalized, rationalize and justify governmental practices and policies that stigmatize and punish certain categories of immigrants and their children.

The discursive construction of Mexican immigrants and their children, and often of Latinos in general, resonates with anthropologist Mary Douglas's insights into the cultural constructions of *Purity and Danger*. She argues that culture classifies things and people into categories that make order out of an otherwise chaotic existence. When something or someone is "out of place," it or they are often considered dangerous, as pollution, threatening the purity of those in place—that is, in their "proper" category. Mexicans in the United States are constructed in the discourse examined here as people out of place and thus as a threat to the nation in which they reside. Put another way, one that Benedict Anderson might agree with, the Latino Threat Narrative does not imagine Latinos, whether immigrants or U.S.-born, as part of the national community.[59] When they do enter into the social imaginary, however, it is as an internal threat to the larger community.

Through news stories, TV and radio talk shows, movies, and more, the media construct social imaginaries, the implicit understandings that form collective subjectivities and make common practices possible.[60] Social imaginaries, argues Edward LiPuma, exist by virtue of representations and provide the taken-for-granted assumptions about identities (e.g., citizens, immigrants, consumers) and belonging in the world. For people immersed in these social imaginaries "there appear to be no genuine alternatives," for "modern agents have increasingly come to imagine these imaginaries as the unquestionably real and natural ground for acting in the world."[61]

The Latino Threat Narrative is a social imaginary in which Latinos are "virtual characters." They exist as "illegal aliens," "illegitimate recipients of organ donations," "highly fertile invaders," and "unassimilable separatists bent on a reconquest of the U.S. Southwest." Their lives are part of a virtual reality, one that is not necessarily tied to empirical evidence. Learning what we know about immigrants indirectly through the media is what anthropologists Daniel Miller and James G. Carrier call virtualism.[62] Virtualism is a critique of contemporary capitalist society and the problems that result when virtual reality is perceived as reality and then we attempt to make the world conform to that virtual vision.[63] We learn about the Latino threat through the media, but the actual lives of Latinos, whether immigrants or U.S.-born, may not correspond to those

constructed, virtual lives. And yet anti-immigrant sentiment and immigration laws are in many ways a response to what we think we know about the Latino threat based on the virtual lives with which we are familiar.

The virtual lives of "Mexicans," "Chicanos," "illegal aliens," and "immigrants" become abstractions and representations that stand in the place of real lives. Rather than actual lives, virtual lives are generalized, iconic, and typified and are turned into statistical means. They are aggregate figures melded into cost-benefit analyses. They are no longer flesh-and-blood people; they exist as images. Because of this, a "global card trick" occurs between virtual personas and real-life personas.[64] The virtual personas of Latino immigrants—represented as a threat to the nation—make the authority that has accumulated for real immigrants in their role as workers and consumers vanish. The positive contributions of Latino immigrants often disappear in public discourse by means of this card trick. Through their very visible marches and demonstrations, immigrants have attempted to subvert the taken-for-granted truths accorded to virtual immigrants and to assert what they believe are their very real, material contributions to society.

As we make this critique of modern culture, we must always keep in mind that real immigrants do exist. Undocumented immigrants have lives. Immigrants and their children eat, breathe, and dream in cities and towns across America. How their actual lives "live up to" their virtual lives as represented in the Latino Threat Narrative is the subject of the next chapter.