



PHOTO ESSAY: RE-MAPPING THE US-MEXICO BORDER/LANDS

The United States-Mexico international border has been unilaterally re-mapped by the US government for almost three decades. In the early 1990s, during the presidency of Bill Clinton, “Operation Hold the Line” in El Paso, Texas (1993); “Operation Gatekeeper” in San Diego, California (1994); “Operation Rio Grande” in McAllen, Texas (1994); and “Operation Safeguard” in the Tucson, Arizona Sector, which covers most of southern New Mexico (1994) contributed to the increased militarization of the US-Mexico border—a militarization that served the purpose, at that time, to help deter unauthorized entries into the United States.

The deadly attacks on the United States by Al Qaeda on September 11, 2001 led to the passage of the USA Patriot Act of 2001. In December 2005, the Sensenbrenner Immigration Bill (H.R. 4437, “The Border Protection, Anti-terrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005”), a response to terrorist threats that included the arbitrary criminalization of undocumented immigrants, was passed in the House of Representatives. Although H.R. 4437 failed in the Senate in the spring of 2006, the criminalization of Latino immigrants in this bill led to an extraordinary, well-organized reaction and mobilization on the part of the Latino community across the continental United States. It was in this highly politicized context that partly as a result of the Latino immigrant marches, on October 26, 2006, President George W. Bush signed the “Secure Fence Act of 2006” (Public Law 109–367). In addition to authorizing additional vehicle barriers, border inspection

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stations as well as advanced technology to reinforce the border, the main goal of the Secure Fence Act was to ‘protect’ the nation by building 700 miles of physical barriers along the US-Mexico border. Congress approved \$1.2 billion dollars for the Act’s implementation. Although by 2009 the Department of Homeland Security had erected approximately 600 miles of barriers, by 2011, the US government cancelled the project’s further implementation due to its unexpected and unplanned financial costs.

With respect to the security features related to the border areas covered by this essay’s photographs, the Secure Fence Act states that “the Secretary of Homeland Security shall provide for...2 layers of reinforced fencing, the installation of additional physical barriers, roads, lighting, cameras, and sensors—(ii) extending from 10 miles west of Calexico, California, port of entry to 5 miles east of the Douglas, Arizona, port of entry; (iii) extending from 5 miles west of Columbus, New Mexico, port of entry to 10 miles east of El Paso, Texas.”

Several of the photographs in this essay show sections of the current fence or wall at the US-Mexico border that resulted from the Secure Fence Act of 2006. The fence or wall images are then intended, on my part, to be juxtaposed with borderland images that capture the social and political relations that manifest the complex ways the borderlands are being remapped through walls and their consequences—all in the context of the still so-called ‘American Dream.’ The goal of the photo essay is to help identify the different ways the remapping of the US-Mexico border itself is being carried out, with or without the “great, beautiful wall” Donald Trump and his supporters are currently imagining and proposing.¹

1. I would like to thank all the “Walls” panel participants at the IASA’s 8th World Congress in Laredo, Texas, especially Virginia Dominguez, for organizing such a much-needed session and for inviting me to participate. I also would like to thank both Virginia and Giorgio Mariani, for considering this photo essay for this particular volume and for our intellectual conversation about world borders throughout the years. Lastly, I would like to thank Margaret Dorsey and Miguel Diaz-Barriga as well as Theresa Avila for their respective collaboration with me on the exhibition of several of my photos both in New York City and in Tempe, Arizona, respectively. The border photographs of Nogales, Arizona and Nogales, Sonora were exhibited in 2017 from April 6th to August 1st at Arizona State University’s Hayden Library as part of the exhibit, “Greater

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In Search of the American Dream / Buscando del Sueño Americano
(from Series: "Cruces: Crosses and Crossings"), 2004

Arizona: Mapping Place, History and Transformation", co-curated by Theresa Avila and myself. The photographs of the Statue of Liberty and the White House, as well the photographs that cover the Paso del Norte region, which include southern New Mexico and the El Paso, Texas-Ciudad Juarez, Mexico border, were exhibited in 2016 from June 2nd to July 30th at the Apexart Gallery in New York City as part of the exhibit, "Fencing in Democracy," organized and curated by Miguel Diaz-Barriga and Margaret Dorsey.

*Walls,
Material and Rhetorical:
Past, Present,
and Future*

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*Statue of Liberty Turns Its Back on Mexican Immigrants
La Estatua de la Libertad le da la Espalda a Inmigrantes Mexicanos
(from Series: "De Espaldas/Seen From the Back"), 2008*



Fenced White House Welcomes Latino Immigrants (2006–2016)
La Casa Blanca Encerrada da Bienvenida a Inmigrantes Latinos (2006–2016)
(from Series: "Cruces: Crosses and Crossings"), 2008



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*Twenty-First Century Pioneers in Arizona
Pioneros del Siglo Veinte-y-Uno en Arizona
(from Series: "De Espaldas/Seen From the Back"), 2016*



Border Patrol Waiting
Patrulla Fronteriza Esperando
(from Series: "De Espaldas/Seen from the Back"), 2016

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Crossing the Bridge: Welcome to the United States
Cruzando el Puente: Bienvenidos a los Estados Unidos
(from Series: "Cruces: Crosses and Crossings"), 2016



Border Wall at Paso del Norte
Muralla Fronteriza en Paso del Norte
(from Series: "Cruces: Crosses and Crossings"), 2016



Border wall between Gadsden, Arizona, and Baja California State, 2016

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Border wall between Nogales, Arizona and Nogales, Sonora
(view from McDonalds), 2017



Border wall view from major street in Nogales, Arizona, 2017



Border wall view from the Mexican side in Nogales, Sonora, 2017

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Border wall view from parking lot in Nogales, Arizona, 2017

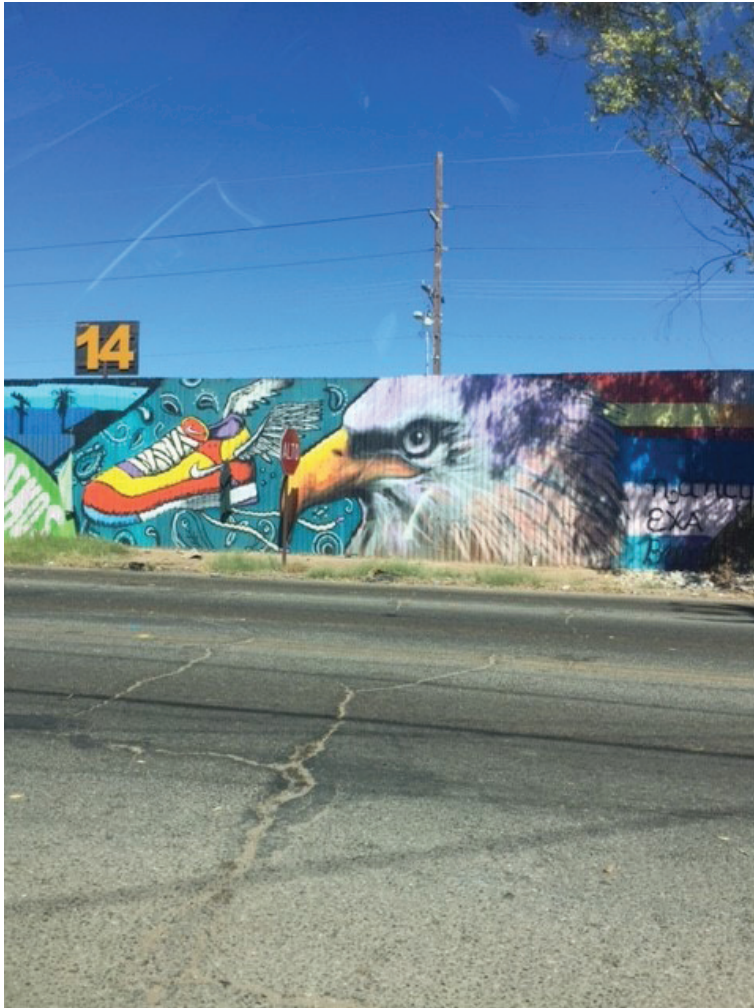


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Border wall between Calexico, California and Mexicali, Baja California, 2017

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American Eagle at the Calexico-Mexicali wall, 2017

