

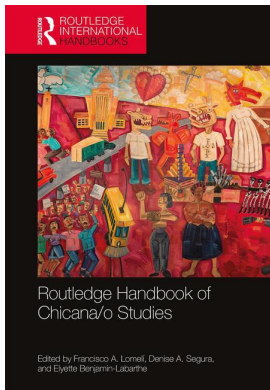
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Immigration, Latinas/os, and the media

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Immigration, Latinas/os, and the media

Leo R. Chávez

In a 1980 presidential debate, candidate Ronald Reagan made this comment: “Rather than talking about putting up a fence, why don’t we work out some recognition of our mutual problems? Make it possible for them to come here legally with a work permit. And then when they want to go back, they can go back. Open the borders both ways” (Lee 2015).

Contrast those sentiments with presidential candidate Donald Trump at a Republican presidential debate on 16 June 2015:

When Mexico sends its people, they’re not sending their best. They’re not sending you. 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.

(TIME 2015)

Trump also said if elected president he would build a “huge” wall along the U.S.–Mexico border and ban all Muslims from coming to the United States. On the sixth day after taking office, President Trump signed executive orders to begin construction of a wall between the United States and Mexico (Chen et al. 2017).

What happened? The hyperbolic anti-immigrant discourse spewed by Donald Trump did not just appear suddenly in contemporary public discourse. Over the last 50 years, public discourse on immigration has increasingly become less affirmative, or positive, and more alarmist. This chapter examines public discourse and media representations of immigration, especially from Mexico and Latin America, and Latinas/os in the United States, and what I have called the “Latino Threat” narrative (Chávez 2013).

Media representations of Latinas/os and Latin American immigrants fluctuate between affirming their place in U.S. society and viewing them as a threat to society (Chavez 2001). However, news media representations of Latina/o immigrants and their children have been less affirmative and more inflammatory since the 1970s (Santa Ana 2013). A study I conducted of magazine covers and their accompanying articles showed that immigrants and their children were increasingly associated with words and visual images denoting negative connotations such as floods, invasion, crisis, reconquest, broken borders, over-population, crime, over-use of social

services, and an inability to integrate socially and culturally. In contrast, stories that spoke positively about immigration were common in the 1970s, but steadily decreased in the 1980s and 1990s (see Figure 8.1). This pattern exists in newspapers such as *The New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Washington Post*, and the *Wall Street Journal* (Massey & Pren 2012).

Although historically immigrants may have been desired for their labor, new waves of immigrants to the United States have often been viewed with suspicion and outright hostility (Gerstle 2004, 2001). Immigrants have been characterized as lowering wages, expanding ethnic neighborhoods, lacking the ability or desire to assimilate, and carrying disease. Public discourse attributes these same threats to today’s Latinas/os. However, public discourse often characterizes Latinas/os as a threat to the nation in other important ways: Their high levels of immigration and fertility rates are said to fuel an invasion and they, particularly those of Mexican origin, pose a potential threat of a take-over, or reconquest, of the Southwest United States. A few examples of the Latino Threat will establish its prevalence as a pervasive narrative of the nation and anti-nation (see also: (Aguirre et al. 2011; Romero 2011; Santa Ana 2002; Coutin & Chock 1995).

In the 1970s, *U.S. News & World Report* began alerting the public that social, political, and demographic trends in Mexico posed future problems for the United States. Their covers had headlines such as “Crisis Across the Borders: Meanings for the U.S.” (13 December 1976), “Border Crisis: Illegal Aliens out of Control” (April 25, 1977) and “ILLEGAL ALIENS: Invasion Out of Control?” (29 January 1979). In all three cases, the subject was the growing flow of undocumented Mexican immigrants and their potential to take over the U.S. Southwest and give it back to Mexico, and to over-use social services. *U.S. News & World Report’s* 4 July 1997 issue pointed to Mexican women’s unchecked fertility as the problem that was fueling the flow of Mexicans to the United States (see cover at: <http://backissues.com/issue/US-News-and-World-Report-July-04-1977>).¹

The 4 July 1977 *U.S. News & World Report’s* (*USNWR*) cover reads: “TIME BOMB IN MEXICO: Why There’ll be No End To the Invasion of ‘Illegals.’” The accompanying image shows a group of men standing, most with their hands in the air or behind their heads. The scene is taking place at night, a strong light making the men visible. The men all have dark hair and appear Latino. A lone Border Patrol agent, barely visible in the background, helps to establish the scene’s location: the U.S.–Mexico border. Use of the word “invasion” conjures many images, none of them friendly or indicating mutual benefit. Friends do not invade; enemies invade. Invasion is an act of war, and puts the nation and its people at great risk. The war metaphor is enhanced by the

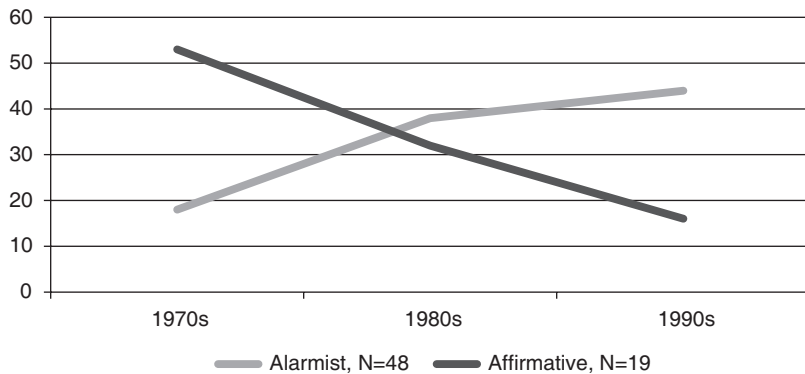


Figure 8.1 Affirmative and alarmist magazine covers over time, in percentages

prominence of the words “Time Bomb.” The text conjures up an image of Mexico as a bomb that, when it explodes, will damage the country. The damage, the message makes clear, will be the unstoppable flow of illegal immigrants to the United States.

The accompanying article cites predictions that Mexico’s population, then at about 64 million, could grow to as many as 132 million by 1997 or so (predictions that did not prove accurate). The yearly population increase at the time was somewhere between 3.2 and 3.5%. In addition to population pressures, Mexico had to confront high levels of unemployment and underemployment (then affecting about 40% of the working age population), rapid urbanization that further strained a limited infrastructure, a level of agricultural production that failed to meet the needs of the country, growing inequality between the rich and poor, and political corruption at all levels of government. Added to these problems was the political consideration of America’s interest in maintaining political stability in Mexico. In this sense, emigration is an “escape hatch” for Mexicans who might otherwise stay and foment political unrest. In short, all of these problems in the Mexican economy and society, combined with Mexico’s attitude towards emigration, mean, according to *U.S. News & World Report*, that controlling the flow of undocumented migrant workers across the border would be difficult.

The 1980s witnessed continued alarmist discourse about Mexican immigration. *U.S. News & World Report*’s 9 March 1981 issue featured the headline “OUR TROUBLED NEIGHBORS – Dangers for U.S.” The problem in Canada, according to this 1981 article, was the possible political turmoil resulting from the French-speaking Canadians’ movement against linguistic and political domination from English-speaking Canadians. On the Mexican side, continued immigration raised the possibility of growing Mexican demographic strength, which posed the probability of a separatist movement following the Quebec example. Two years later, on 7 March 1983, *U.S. News & World Report* returned to the invasion theme. The cover’s text announces: “Invasion from Mexico: It Just Keeps Growing” (see cover at: <http://backissues.com/issue/US-News-and-World-Report-March-07-1983>).²

This cover is momentous in that the metaphor of war – invasion – is attached to a particular foreign country, Mexico. Mexico is now explicitly placed in the role of aggressor and the United States is the nation whose sovereign territory is under attack by this hostile country and its people. The image on the cover is a photograph of women being carried by men across a canal of water. The people in the picture are phenotypically Latina/o, or Mexican. In the accompanying articles we learn about the “flood of illegal aliens in unparalleled volume” that is no match for the understaffed and beleaguered U.S. Border Patrol (Chaze and Migdail 1983, p. 37). The “invaders,” we learn, are desperate job seekers, willing to “risk all” to cross the border (Chaze and Migdail 1983, p. 38). With an increase in the clandestine flow across the border came a rise in the number of deaths due to exposure to the elements in rugged hill country and open deserts. Deaths also occurred from accidents as migrants frantically crossed busy streets or attempted to jump onto freight trains moving further north.

A year later, *Newsweek*’s 25 June 1984 issue carried the headline: “Closing the Door? The Angry Debate Over Illegal Immigration. Crossing the Río Grande.” The cover’s image relies on many of the same basic visual elements to tell its story as the *U.S. News & World Report* cover above. Once again we have a photographic image of a man carrying a woman across a shallow body of water. The woman is wearing a headscarf and a long shawl. The man carries the woman’s handbag, which suggests she is traveling somewhere, moving with a purpose and for an extended amount of time. She holds a walking cane.

Leaving aside the text on this and the previous cover for a moment, the images themselves do a lot to establish the theme and location of the events taking place. They do so through the use of stereotypical phenotypes, clothing, and “common sense” understandings of how Mexicans cross

the border. In short, the images hit upon a number of touchstones related to undocumented Mexican immigration. For example, the water in the image could be anywhere, but the phenotypes, complexion (the color photographs clearly show their brown skin and black hair), and clothing suggest the people are Mexicans. In addition, the people – Mexicans – in conjunction with the activity they are engaged in – crossing water – situates otherwise nondescript water as “border water.” This message derives from the American public’s cultural understanding of the history of Mexican immigration to the United States. As Claire F. Fox has observed, “Generally speaking, the Río Grande/Río Bravo and the fence are the two primary contemporary icons used to establish the location of a narrative in the border region” (Fox 1996, p. 60). The cultural stereotype is that Mexican immigration occurs over water (water is also a basic metaphor for immigration). Mexicans in this immigration narrative arrive “wet” after having crossed the Río Grande River to illegally enter the United States. The derogatory label “wetback,” commonly applied to undocumented immigrants from Mexico, derives from this migration narrative. The images rely on this commonly held understanding of Mexican immigration to develop their narratives and to engage the reader’s attention quickly.

There is also an important reference to women on the two covers. In both cases, it is a woman who is prominently featured as being carried across the water and into the United States. Since we are also warned that an “invasion” is occurring, the prominence of females in the images must be read as conveying an important message about the “invaders.” Rather than an invading army, or even the stereotypical male migrant worker, the images suggest a more insidious invasion, one that includes the capacity of the invaders to reproduce. The women being carried into U.S. territory carry with them the seeds of future generations. The images signal not simply a concern over undocumented workers, but a concern with immigrants who stay and form families and, by extension, communities in the United States. The images of the Mexican women being offered up, as it were, to American society bring to mind another image, that of the Trojan Horse. Indeed, a prominent feature of anti-immigrant discourse has been the fears of political unrest by the children of Mexican immigrants and a reconquest of U.S. territory by reproduction. Moreover, reproduction of immigrant families not only raises issues of population growth, but their use of prenatal care and children’s health services, education, and other social services. Importantly, the woman on *Newsweek’s* cover also carries a walking stick, which subliminally raises the possibility that she is infirm and may require medical services in the United States.

U.S. News & World Report’s 19 August 1985 cover escalated the invasion theme to a new level by suggesting that the United States is losing cultural and political control over its territory (see cover at: <http://backissues.com/issue/US-News-and-World-Report-August-19-1985>).³ The text announces: “The Disappearing Border: Will the Mexican Migration Create a New Nation?” But it is the image that so artfully and so colorfully tells a story of Mexicans taking over the United States. The cover’s image represents the relationship of the two nations through the strategic use of the colors in their respective national flags. Are the red and blue of the U.S. flag fading up into the sunset of history? Central to the image are the large block letters “U” and “S”; they are white. These letters sit in a field of green, and rest atop smaller red letters forming the word MEXICO (green and red being the principal colors in the Mexican flag). Placing the white U.S. letters on a field of green suggests that the question of which flag the color belongs to is irrelevant, since the United States is embedded in, and surrounded by the green of Mexico. The United States is already absorbed into Mexico’s field.

Inside the magazine, immigration-related issues are addressed in no less than six articles. The first of these is titled “The Disappearing Border,” and sets up the magnitude of the changes wrought by Mexican immigration and profiles the immigrants’ socioeconomic characteristics.

The article begins by telling a story, a narrative of contemporary Mexican immigration that establishes a “reconquest” theme:

Now sounds the march of new conquistadors in the American Southwest. . . . Their movement is, despite its quiet and largely peaceful nature, both an invasion and a revolt. At the vanguard are those born here. . . . Behind them comes an unstoppable mass . . . from below the border who also claim ancestral homelands in the Southwest.

(Lang 1985, p. 30)

Importantly, in *U.S. News & World Report's* narrative of invasion and reconquest it is not just recent Mexican immigrants who pose a threat, but also Americans descended from the first Spanish-speaking explorers of the Southwest. Not even 400 years of living in the Southwest, over 150 years as U.S. citizens, reduces the threat posed by Latinas/os in the Southwest. Apparently, according to this argument, they have remained socially and linguistically separate, biding their time for a “revolt” and a takeover. In other words, the conspiracy for the reconquest of the Southwest has been in operation for generations and spans centuries. That so far-fetched and unsupported a scenario could be seriously presented in a national magazine attests to how deep the unquestioned assumptions about invasion and reconquest had, by this point, entered into public discourse. There is no critical perspective on the assumption of difference being put forward here, a difference so great and incommensurable that the people so designated are not even subject to the normal expectations of social and cultural change. It is as if Mexican Americans and other Latinas/os exist in an ahistorical space apart from the life that takes place all around them. They are cast as “alien-citizens” with divided allegiances, perpetual foreigners despite being U.S. citizens by birth, even after many generations (Ngai 2004, p. 11). Such notions have become an acceptable part of public discourse even among otherwise learned scholars.

As the nation entered the 1990s, two issues, multiculturalism and race, dominated the public discourse about the implications of immigration on the nation. *Time's* 9 April 1990 cover confronts directly the changing racial composition of American society (see cover at: <http://content.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,19900409,00.html>).⁴ The cover's image featured an illustration of the American flag. The colors of the flag, however, were not the traditional red, white, and blue. The colors black, brown, and yellow now almost completely filled the three previously white stripes, which still retain a small amount of white along the edges. Gone are the white stars in the upper left field of blue.

What has happened to the flag? The flag stands for the nation and the colors represent race in America's racial thinking. White, black, brown, and yellow represent white Americans, African Americans, Latinas/os, and Asian Americans, respectively. White Americans are becoming less demographically important as racial-ethnic minorities increase numerically. The message conveyed by the image is reinforced by the text: “America's Changing Colors: What will the U.S. be like when whites are no longer the majority?”

The article “Beyond The Melting Pot” discusses the demographic trends that will result in racial and ethnic groups outnumbering whites in the nation sometime in the 21st century. As *Time* put it, “The ‘browning of America’ will alter everything in society, from politics and education to industry, values and culture” (*TIME* 1990, p. 28). This change represents a fundamental shift from a “traditional” or “real” America that is envisioned by “some” as a white, European-origin society. The “browning of America” poses opportunities and risks. The risks are a multiracial society that is harder to govern as Hispanics “maintain that the Spanish language is inseparable from their ethnic and cultural identity, and seek to remain bilingual, if not primarily Spanish-speaking, for life” (*TIME* 1990, pp. 28–31) and as racial and ethnic conflict increases,

particularly as African Americans “feel their needs are getting a lower priority” (*TIME* 1990, pp. 28–30).

Multiculturalism, in particular, poses a threat to those who believe that every society needs a universally accepted set of values (*TIME* 1990, p. 31). The article predicts that demographic change and multiculturalism will cause serious adjustment among whites, who consider the nation as reflecting their own image.

The deeper significance of America becoming a majority nonwhite society is what it means to the national psyche, to individuals’ sense of themselves and the nation – their idea of what it is to be American. . . . White Americans are accustomed to thinking of themselves as the very picture of their nation.

(*TIME* 1990, pp. 30–31)

It is an interesting idea that a nation can be lost through demographic change. Differences in beliefs and behaviors attributed to races are not constructed; in this logic they come with the racial package of the person. Race, with the inherent beliefs attached to it, becomes equated with the nation. It is not American culture, values, ethics, etc. that define the nation, but rather the color of skin, the texture of hair, the shape of a face that characterize the nation. What *Time* is suggesting is that the nation can be lost should these physical traits change.

The National Review entered the debate over immigration and the nation’s changing racial composition on 22 June 1992 (see cover at: www.unz.org/Pub/NationalRev-1992jun22).⁵ The cover featured an illustration of the Statue of Liberty standing with a very serious expression on her face and her arm straight out with palm up in a halting gesture. She has been transformed into a traffic cop, stopping the flow of immigrant traffic into the nation. Actually, the text informs us that she is actually re-directing the flow of immigrants to another country: “Tired? Poor? Huddled? Tempest-Tossed? Try Australia. Rethinking Immigration.”

The feature article, “Rethinking Immigration,” begins with an image of an INS (Immigration and Naturalization Service)⁶ waiting room, which the author, Peter Brimelow, suggests would have become a tenth Circle of Hell had Dante ever visited one. In the article, Brimelow presents his views on immigration, which he later expanded upon in his controversial book, *Alien Nation: Common Sense About America’s Immigration Disaster* (Brimelow 1995). Brimelow, an immigrant from Britain, favors restricting immigration from Third World countries. He also advocates developing a policy that would reverse demographic trends so that Americans of European racial/national backgrounds would equal pre-1965 proportions.

There is much about immigration and today’s immigrants that Brimelow does not like, but underlying all his reasons seems to be race. His view of race appears to include both biological differences and difficult-to-lose beliefs and behaviors. Brimelow finds that Hispanics are particularly troublesome, going so far as to claim they are “Symptomatic of the American Anti-Idea,” which is neither defined nor clarified. 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 various groups of Spanish-speaking immigrants are now much less encouraged to assimilate to American culture. Instead . . . they are treated by U.S. government agencies as a homogenous “protected class.”

(*Brimelow* 1992, p. 45)

The “anti-nation” Brimelow refers to is not located geographically, nor is its contours figured in any descriptive sense. But that it is out there somewhere is clear, at least in Brimelow’s mind. How these

characterizations of Latinas/os conform to the data on the use of English language among immigrants and their children and the climb of a goodly portion into the middle class by U.S.-born, English-speaking Latinas/os is not at all clear. But from this basis, Brimelow moves to deplore bilingualism, multiculturalism, multilingual ballots, citizenship for children of illegal immigrants, the abandonment of English as a prerequisite for citizenship, the erosion of citizenship as the sole qualification for voting, welfare and education for illegal immigrants and their children, and congressional and state legislative apportionment based on populations that include illegal immigrants (Brimelow 1992, p. 45).

Brimelow ends with a call to stop immigration into the United States. "It may be time to close the second period of American history with the announcement that the U.S. is no longer an 'immigrant country'" (*National Review* 1992, p. 46). Brimelow's reasons for stopping immigration include his son, who "seems to like it here" (are we to assume from this that his son likes the country but not its people?) and the memories of Americans from his childhood. When he was a young boy in England at the end of World War II, Brimelow remembers American soldiers lodging with his aunt. One soldier's wife showed his family color slides of Southern California, where she and her husband intended to settle after the war. He wondered what they, now old, might think of the "unprecedented experiment" that is changing the demographic makeup of California and the nation "they so bravely represented." It is revealing that Brimelow does not say it, but we are supposed to assume that these soldiers were white. I suppose it did not enter into Brimelow's mind that American soldiers during World War II consisted of every racial and ethnic background in the country, including African Americans, Latinas/os, Asian Americans (including Japanese Americans), and American Indians. His image of America, as symbolized by the soldiers in his story, was white, then and now.

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 (Buchanan 1994, p. B7). 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" (Buchanan 1994, p. B7). For Buchanan, Latina/o immigrants and their children pose the risk of a separatist movement, which would very likely seek to take over U.S. territory and return it to Mexico's control. That some 15 years later the dire predictions of a demand for Quebec-like status by Latinas/os has not occurred has not given Buchanan pause, as his more recent writings indicate (see more later).

The new century was greeted with more alarmist news about the threat posed by Mexicans and other Latinas/os in the United States. In 2000, writing in *The American Enterprise*, Samuel P. Huntington wrote:

The invasion of over 1 million Mexican civilians is a comparable threat [to 1 million Mexican soldiers] to American societal security, and Americans should react against it with comparable vigor. Mexican immigration looms as [a] . . . disturbing challenge to our cultural integrity, our national identity, and potentially to our future as a country.

(Huntington 2000, p. 22)

The new millennium witnessed continued media representations of Latinas/os taking over the United States. *Time's* 11 June 2001 cover featured two Latina/o kids, looking "cool" with

sunglasses, wearing the current fashions for children (see cover at: <http://content.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,20010611,00.html>).⁷ However, they were part of a threat, as the headlines alerted its readers: “Welcome to AMEXICA: The border is vanishing before our eyes, creating a new world for all of us.” That new world is suggested the blending of the words AMERICA and MEXICO to become AMEXICA. The colors in the word AMEXICA are a mix of red, white, and blue (the U.S. flag) with red and green (the Mexican flag). In short, Mexico and the United States are becoming one nation, a frightening thought to many of *Time’s* readers.

After September 11, 2001, public discourse in the United States focused on the dangers the country faces in the contemporary world. The new post-9/11 concerns for national security did not eclipse a public discourse on the alleged threat to the nation posed by Mexican 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 40 years that they could be said to be independent of the current fear of international terrorism. Even though the events of 9/11 “raised the stakes” and added a new and urgent argument for confronting all perceived threats to national security, the Mexican threat still had currency in the new post-9/11 world. Consider this quote from Samuel P. Huntington’s article in the March/April 2004 issue of *Foreign Policy*, in which he compared Latinas/os, especially Mexicans, to earlier waves of European immigrants:

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.

(Huntington 2004a, p. 30)

He goes on to say:

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.

(Huntington 2004a, p. 32)

Also in 2004, Samuel Huntington published *Who We Are: Challenges to America’s National Identity*, which focused on the threat of Mexican immigration. He repeats the problems with Mexican immigration found in the quotations that began this chapter. He speaks of a Mexican “*reconquista*” or reconquest, a blurring of the border between Mexico and the United States, and the problem of a blending of cultures. This is 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” (Huntington 2004b, p. 222). He argues that Mexican immigrants and their children are not assimilating in the use of English, educational attainment, occupation and incomes, and intermarriage. He writes, “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” (Huntington 2004a, p. 227). In short, the “*reconquista*” leads to the formation of a separate nation.

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 against terrorism in Afghanistan, and still searching for Bin Laden and al-Qaeda operatives

worldwide. And yet amid all these crises, Huntington singled out Latin American, particularly Mexican, immigration as America's most serious challenge.

BusinessWeek's 15 March 2004 issue also raised the possibility of a "Hispanic Nation" emerging within the United States. With a large and bold headline, its cover visibly shouts "HISPANIC NATION," followed by, "Hispanics are an immigrant group like no other. Their huge numbers are changing old ideas about assimilation. Is America ready?" (see cover at: <http://backissues.com/issue/Business-Week-March-15-2004>).⁸ The cover's text represents the Latina/o population as unique in contrast to other immigrant groups, which did not form separate independent nations in the United States and for which assimilation was, supposedly, a smooth and linear process. Assimilation for other immigrant groups, historically and today, is set up as the banner example of the "old ideas about assimilation." We can only assume that the Hispanics who are the subject of *BusinessWeek's* cover are changing these old ideas in ways that do not reflect assimilation but rather the social, cultural, and linguistic separatism that will result in a separate nation.

Pat Buchanan reiterated his dire predictions of the impact of Latinas/os on the nation. Speaking on MSNBC on 24 March 2009, he said:

Mexico is the greatest foreign policy crisis I think America faces in the next 20, 30 years. We're going to have 135 million Hispanics in the United States by 2050, heavily concentrated in the southwest. The question is whether we're going to survive as a country.

(Buchanan 2009, YouTube)

Conclusion

Since the 2008 election of Barack Obama as president of the United States, there has been a growth in the number of militia groups. Government officials, worried by this trend, and an organization that tracks militias, cited two reasons for this growth: 1) the poor economy and a liberal administration led by a Black president; and 2) conspiracy theories about a secret Mexican plan to reclaim the Southwest amid the public debate about illegal immigration (Sullivan 2009, p. 36). This fear reverberates with the Latino Threat narrative.

What I have attempted to show here is that contemporary representations of Latinas/os, both immigrants and U.S.-born citizens, as threats to the nation have been part of the public discourse for decades. Most recently, President Trump's diatribes about Mexican immigrants and their children, while jaw-dropping in their crudity, are not new. They come out of a clear set of articulated threats found in the media. Some may laugh off complaints of such rhetoric being offensive as being overly "politically correct." However, the representations presented question whether or not Latina/o immigrants and their families really belong to the nation. The Latino Threat narrative so prevalent in the media construes Latinas/os as the enemy within rather than as contributing members of society. While many may not agree with such characterizations, the continued use of such representations creates taken-for-granted "truths" in the public's imagination that can be hard to refute and readily available to nativists, media pundits, and politicians who wish to use such views to their own ends.

Notes

- 1 See cover at: <http://backissues.com/issue/US-News-and-World-Report-July-04-1977>
- 2 See cover at: <http://backissues.com/issue/US-News-and-World-Report-March-07-1983>
- 3 See cover at: <http://backissues.com/issue/US-News-and-World-Report-August-19-1985>
- 4 See cover at: <http://content.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,19900409,00.html>

- 5 See cover at: www.unz.org/Pub/NationalRev-1992jun22
- 6 INS (the Immigration and Naturalizations Service of the United States) was an agency of the U.S. Department of Justice from 1933 to 2003. In 2003, with the newly created Department of Homeland Security, the functions of INS were transferred to three new agencies: U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), and U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP).
- 7 See cover at: <http://content.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,20010611,00.html>
- 8 See cover at: <http://backissues.com/issue/Business-Week-March-15-2004>

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