

Minuteman Project: to report or not?

You have just been awarded a major NSF grant to study and do an ethnography on the “Minuteman Project.” The Project is an activist organization started in August 2004 by a group of private individuals in the United States to “extrajudicially monitor” the United States-Mexico border's flow of undocumented immigrants. Founded by Jim Gilchrist and Chris Simcox, the name derives from the “militiamen” who fought in the American Revolution. The Minuteman Project describes itself as “a citizens' Neighborhood Watch on our border,” and has attracted media attention to illegal immigration. They setup up outposts along the border to hunt down and report the location of immigrants to federal Customs and Border Patrol agents. In but one segment of the border, that of southwest Texas, according to US officials upwards of 52,000 unaccompanied minors have crossed the Mexican border into the United States in the first half of 2014. Gilchrist plans to recruit as many as 3,500 volunteers to participate in a massive border fortification next year. These efforts are not officially endorsed by the federal government.

As part of your participant observations, you will patrol segments of the border with Minutemen. As much of their patrolling occurs at night, at times you will be given night vision goggles to watch for migrants.

Dilemmas: While using our goggles, what would you do if you saw an unaccompanied minor or any immigrant crossing? Report the individual or not, to the Minutemen?

And further, if asked your own opinions and thoughts about the immigrants by Minutemen, what would you do or say?