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Book Review
Waiting for Jose: The Minutemen's Pursuit of America

Harel Shapira
2013
Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press
152 pages
Hardcover: \$25.16
ISBN: 978-0-691-15215-8

Harel Shapira is an ethnographer, sociologist, and assistant professor at the University of Texas, Austin. Shapira's book, *Waiting for Jose*, is directed toward individuals willing to explore beyond the superficial depictions of the Minutemen and attempt to understand their motivations for patrolling the border. Shapira argues that the Minutemen, as an organization, is an outlet for generally older men with military experience to reproduce their lives as soldiers and, subsequently, gain a sense of purpose and meaning. Additionally, he asserts that the Minutemen construct Jose as the enemy in order to exhibit their patriotism and develop an identity founded on masculinity. Overall, Shapira explores the Minutemen's varied motivations exceptionally well, even noting the organization's internal conflicts. His sociological explanations are relevant and help to interpret the Minutemen's culture. Albeit at times adamant at reducing the Minutemen's motivations to causes other than xenophobia, ethnocentrism, racism, and discrimination, *Waiting for Jose* provides a unique vantage point of individuals experiencing a loss of place in an ever-increasing diverse America.

Within the Introduction, Shapira presents the Minutemen through the lens of behavior, of practices, and not ideology. The central argument here is that either/or frameworks do not accurately describe people, much less the Minutemen. As an ethnographic endeavor, Shapira also relates his need to *act* like the Minutemen to receive tentative acceptance by them, which itself is reflective of other Minutemen's experiences as they pursue integration into this exclusive civic organization. This organization, moreover, is stratified, with status distinctions that continuously involve performances and distinguish the real Minutemen from the false. Chapter 1 presents the Minutemen's central concern: the decline of America. For the Minutemen, the decline of America parallels their own decline, of their own dissipating utility and increasing sense of lack of belonging. It is this wish to reclaim America for "Americans" that the Minutemen create a social world, a social space that lauds nationalism and masculinity. Chapter 2 elaborates on the Minutemen's social interactions, specifically the performances conducted by the men to establish hierarchy and their individual identities. This performance is poignantly captured in Chapter 3, through Gordon, a Minuteman whose personal transformation highlights the power of the desire to be accepted.

Chapter 4 presents the psychological constructs the Minutemen use to engender their social world. Moreover, this chapter highlights the contradictory ideas these men hold about the *Other* and the often desperate fear they possess of both Jose and what he represents: themselves, "weak, marginalized, and separated from the country they want to call their own" (p. 123).

Chapter 5 provides an overview of the similarities and differences between the Minutemen and the Samaritans, a religious group that patrols the border to provide humanitarian assistance to migrants, and endorses the argument that despite different ideologies, both organizations essentially complete the same actions. That is, Shapira asserts, it is the meaning that each group attributes to their actions that “distinguishes” them from one another. Namely, both groups engage in civic initiative, albeit for different purposes. The Conclusion summarizes how, paradoxically, the Minutemen emerged from Chris Simcox’s, the Minutemen’s co-founder, inability to become an agent of the state. Namely, it appears that his exclusion prompted him to create a space for inclusion.

Shapira provides a different and detailed perspective of the Minutemen, focusing upon practices and behavior rather than ideology. This focus, however, is both its strength and weakness. The focus on practices is reductionistic – it implies that action is not guided by ideology. Through relevant sociological explanations, one may empathize with the Minutemen and their feelings of displacement. Notwithstanding, it often appears that Shapira wishes to justify their behavior. Additionally, although his individual characters are intriguing and revelatory, one wonders which Minutemen were excluded from this book.

This work can be relevant to individuals living along the U.S.-Mexico border, specifically people who encounter the varied groups interacting at the border. Arguably, human rights groups and the Minutemen themselves would benefit from this book. For the former, it would potentially allow them to see beyond superficial characterizations of these men. For the latter, it may challenge the Minutemen to analyze their reasons for being Minutemen. Overall, for rural social workers, this book may help sensitize them to the psychosocial needs of the Minutemen. More importantly, this book may prompt rural social workers to help these men locate (more productive) spaces to achieve meaning and purpose.

Reviewer Information

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