

John Carlos Frey. *Sand and Blood: America's Stealth War on the Mexico Border* New York, NY: Bold Type Books, 2019. 243 pp. US\$28.00 (hardcover). ISBN 978-156858-847-6

Questions about policies regarding the US-Mexico Border have either polarized or brought together Americans in regards to the prosecution of Mexican and Central American immigrants. In the past decade, migrants have been migrating northwards in vacillating numbers from Central America and Mexico in order to seek refuge from persecution, gang violence, poor economic conditions, domestic abuse, and the effects of climate change. *Sand and Blood: America's Stealth War on the Mexico Border* provides an overview of the history of policies and rhetoric regarding the US border with Mexico. Frey juxtaposes policy decisions with individual experiences affected thereby, and in so doing provides a compelling narrative about the experiences of migrants, US citizens, Mexican citizens, and his own experience as someone who grew up in rural San Diego, just a few miles from the Mexican border. He has worked as an investigative journalist for the past decade in South America and at the border, and he draws from his experience in order to bring a personal perspective on what he describes as a secret war on the border.

Frey provides a balanced and accurate history of the US militarization of the southern border. His book comes during the presidency of Donald Trump, whose policies regarding the US-Mexico Border are not particularly novel, despite the rhetoric. He has, however, been the most vocal and the most polarizing, spewing rhetoric of violence and hate that has put migrants into the crosshairs of US foreign policy. Frey argues that the rhetoric of stereotyping migrants as fleeing criminals is not new, and has become a tool for stirring the electorate ever since Governor Pete Wilson ran a campaign based rhetoric that undocumented immigrants had overrun the state in California. Wilson's campaign of xenophobia and anti-immigration, alongside of his support for Bill 187, led him to a landslide victory. This racist rhetoric acts as a powerful political tool that polarizes voters, and manufactures a common enemy in the form of a foreign-born "other" (25).

The introductory chapter draws readers in, and establishes Frey's credibility as a reliable witness to how the border has evolved. He begins by documenting the story of his mother who, while out for a walk in San Diego, was arrested and then deported to Mexico, even though at the time she was a legal resident in the United States. Frey, who was at that time a child, and his father, didn't hear from her for over twenty-four hours, leading them to assume she was a missing person. He then delves the broader context of the US Southern border, beginning with a 1753 quote by Benjamin Franklin, one of the first anti-immigrant remarks from an American leader: "Those who come hither are generally of the most ignorant stupid sort of their own nation...they come in droves. They will soon outnumber us, that all the advantages we have will not in my opinion be able to preserve our language, and even our government will become precarious." (11) Frey pursues the evolution of anti-immigrant rhetoric in the United States, and highlights the legislation that put in place the border patrol, and its eventual militarization under Ronald Reagan's Immigration Reform and Control Act.

Frey also recalls a report that came Sandia Laboratories, a government lab and research facility that has since been owned by various military contractors. The report lays out a plan for the southern border by examining the effect of migrants immigrating to the United States, and provides suggestions for how to best address illegal border crossings. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, all of the proposed solutions blatantly benefit defense contractors. It was used by the Clinton administration, and subsequent presidents, to target migrants for the benefit of defense contractors. These policies led to the creation of Operation Hold the Line and Operation Gatekeeper, which sealed migrants off from accessing metropolitan areas. These and other initiatives have been part

of the militarization of the southern border. He then moves into the topic of 9/11 and its lasting effect on US immigration control. The policy that followed 9/11 came with the rhetoric that labelled the immigrant as a potential terrorist or the "enemy" bringing about the Secure Fence Act and other such initiatives, aimed at further militarization of the border.

Chapter five, *Death as Deterrent*, highlights United States government's use of death as a deterrent to migrants who are fleeing persecution, and attempting to cross the border illegally. The strategy is to push migrants to travel through inhospitable mountain and desert terrains which are left open, since they are too remote and inhospitable for either roads or fences. Frey argues there is no way to even calculate the number of innocent people this policy has killed, since the government purposefully avoids calculating the number of migrants, and makes no effort to find migrants in the desert. Desperate migrants cross this deadly terrain because despite its perils, it's safer than their current situation. Frey challenges the rhetoric that claims that migrants are just trying to take advantage of the United States, and insists instead that they are impoverished and simply anxious to protect their families. When referring to Trump's presidency, he takes a factual and as bipartisan position as possible, arguing that Trump was given the tools to carry out his immigration policies by both his democratic and republican predecessors. While he makes it clear he does not support Trump, he carefully avoids blaming him for the entire situation. The Trump administration reminds naysayers that undocumented migrants are committing crimes according American immigration laws that were put in place by the Bush administration. Trump has so far enacted some new policy moves through executive order by increasing the scrutiny on H1-B Visa holders, which negatively affect the US high tech industry. The long-term repercussions of these policies are not even fully understood yet, and may not be for years to come

*Sand and Blood* makes it clear that expanding fences and walls along the southern American border is a deadly game that will only lead to more casualties, as desperate migrants will find a way to escape their dangerous situations in seek of security by any means, legal or illegal, safe or dangerous. Frey employs stories about actual migrants to argue that migrants will continue to try their luck on the border, because they feel they do not have any other options. But He loses some of the momentum in the middle chapters of his book, when repeated references to policies lead to a high level of repetition. The reader would have derived more benefit from additional stories from migrants themselves, since such narratives help to humanize the entire situation. He also could have included more discussions of how climate change has induced people to migrate, in evidence for example in the migrant caravans that came to the US- Mexico border from Central and South America. Nevertheless, this is a must-read book for any American citizen interested in breaking-down immigration rhetoric on both sides of the aisle. One of the profound effects of this book was to reinforce that most migrants don't want to leave their country, but only do so under the kind of duress that cannot be impeded by laws or walls. In order to make alleviate the suffering incurred at the border, it is imperative that we come to understand the factors that drive people to cross the border illegally. Frey's work is a crucial step in that direction.