

Confronting Nativist Discourse: Drawing Upon a Critical Theory of Adult Education for Humanizing Antagonisms Along the Mexico-U.S. Borderlands

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Introduction

On January 20, 2025, the second Trump administration began, following a farewell address by President Joe Biden warning "Today an oligarchy is taking shape in America of extreme wealth, power, and influence that really threatens our entire democracy, our basic rights and freedom" (Davies, 2025). Trump initiated tax cuts for the ultra-wealthy, known as Trump's Big Beautiful Bill Policy, which redistributed wealth upwards (Neuman, 2025), and aligned with efforts to deregulate federal agencies to strengthen corporate power. His populist messages are framed as common-sense actions (Kurtzleben, 2025), to protect capitalism from criticism by embedding wealthy individuals in key economic positions (Charalambous et al, 2025). Additionally, a nativist diversion tactic has been employed to deflect attention from their profit-driven agenda by scapegoating vulnerable populations.

Contemporary Nativism in the U.S. Nation-State

Nativism often reinforces racist ideologies by framing differences as threats and promoting intolerance. It characterizes immigrants as invaders who may disrupt U.S. values and culture, creating a racialized "other" based on physical traits, language, and religion (Newth, 2023). The contemporary rise of radical right-wing nativism has led to heightened hostility towards marginalized immigrant groups, who are blamed for social and economic issues such as resource depletion and burdens on educational and correctional systems (Betz, 2017).

Trump's allies and affiliated right-wing anti-immigrant groups have labeled immigrants as criminal others by perpetuating harmful stereotypes. This

derives from ideology that equates criminality with poverty and men of color. Such rhetoric socially perpetuates racialized social class marginalization while overlooking the normalized, harmful behaviors of the bourgeoisie (Bloch & Myers, 2017). Understanding the history of the Mexico-U.S. borderlands is crucial for resisting marginalization, but more importantly, for reducing the harm of internalizing such insidious rhetoric.

La Frontera/Mexico-U.S. Borderlands: A History

It is essential to comprehend the history of the Mexico-U.S. borderlands, including resistance to marginalization and the damaging impact of anti-immigrant rhetoric, to effectively counter nativism. This historical understanding acts as a tool for resistance and promotes clarity. The border extends 1,954 miles across seven Mexican states and four U.S. states (Acuna, 2007). It is also important to recognize this region as the ancestral land of indigenous peoples, who faced genocidal warfare that forced them into these borderlands (Leza, 2019). After gaining independence from Spain in 1821, Mexico had no defined borders with the U. S. and encouraged Anglo settlers to move to Coahuila y Tejas (Texas) (Navarro, 2005). Euro-American immigrants, bringing African slaves, were required to adopt Catholicism, respect laws, and learn Spanish for citizenship and land grants (Gonzalez, 2022).

In 1829, Mexico banned slavery, causing conflict with European descendant citizens. The Texas Insurrection in 1835 led to Texas declaring independence. Mexico viewed it as a breakaway province. In 1845, the U. S. annexed Texas, causing border tensions over the Nueces River versus the *Rio Bravo* being the border. The disagreement led to the U.S. provoking a war, resulting in Mexico ceding over half its territory with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, and later more territory in the 1854 Gadsden Purchase. This area became significant during the height of the Chicano Movement in the 1960's, as it served as a mythical homeland for Chicanas/os; many would refer to it as occupied Aztlán (the homeland of the Aztec people) (Acuña, 2021; González, 2022; Navarro, 2005).

The Mexico-U.S. Borderlands were carved out in bloodshed, and since their inception, have been viewed as a no-man's land by apparatuses of the U.S. Government and rogue elements alike (Chavez, 2013). It is projected as a war zone where the enemy resides. A historical sphere where a disdain has been intergenerationally reproduced against the Republic of Mexico as the gates to the masses of Latina/o America (Garcia, 1985), and their indignant people, by way of racialized social class ideologies trumped through nativism (Navarro, 2008). And with a fear of the continued browning of U.S. America, and the

eventual historical demographic demise of the settler-colonial project initiated during the 1500s.

The Mexican Enemy Phantom South of The Border

An initial assault by Trump, his loyalists, and their authoritarian regime began as an attempt to invalidate birthright citizenship for babies born to undocumented immigrants (Pinto & Khan, 2025), which is undoubtedly a nativist, racialized social class ideology saturates and normalizes racism within the confines of the U.S. nation-state. This also problematically defines citizenship as racialized. Further nativist anti-immigrant sentiments ramped up under the second Trump oligarchy in the U.S. nation-state, saw undocumented immigrants from various parts of Latina/o America deported to their home countries, in some instances by way of C-130 U.S. military cargo planes (Corpi, 2025).

This coincided with the Trump oligarchy labeling Mexican drug cartels as foreign terrorist organizations and threatening military action against them, and stated he authorized the military to “kill them” (Knickenmyer, 2025). The Trump oligarchy further saber-rattled by stating naval air attacks would be followed by strikes on land. The Trump oligarchy justified such actions as self-defense against an armed attack on the U.S. and the flooding of drugs into U.S. communities. Simultaneously, the Trump oligarchy invoked the Alien Enemies Act of 1798 (Ferreirra Santos, 2025), a wartime federal law that authorizes the U.S. president to apprehend, restrain, secure, and deport foreign nationals in ‘time of war’. (It had not been enacted since World War II).

But the administration made no mention of humanistic measures to reduce or treat drug demand. Scholars of geography studies have critiqued how the so-called drug war in Mexico is framed, seeing the violence as occurring close to limited natural resources. In terms of the production of lead, zinc, silver, and gold, the Mexican state of Chihuahua ranks as the second most significant in the nation (Paley, 2015). According to Green (2010), the border industrial complex—which includes Blackhawk helicopters, unmanned spy drones, ground-based sensors, physical and virtual fencing, border patrol agents, and military personnel—is fueled by border rhetoric tied to immigration.

Further hostilities were aggravated by the imposition of trade tariffs against Mexico, which sent a message of confronting a phantom enemy south of the border (Telesur, 2025a). Such border hysteria resurfaces in the U.S. nation-state within the politics of fluctuation, where, when the economy is strong, undocumented Mexican immigrants are championed. In contrast, on the flip

side of the coin, when the economy is weak, they are scapegoated for social ills (Healey & O'Brien, 2022). Regardless of the perspective, cheap Mexican immigrant labor is welcomed, while the dignity of the human being is not, with the root of such ideology being chattel slavery in the early foundations of the United States and the normalized state-sanctioned violence associated with such epoch in human history (Reichel, 1988).

Immigrants & Intelligentsia: A Simultaneous Siege

Higher education was the target of hostile aggression within the U.S. nation-state. The federal government reduced funding in an effort to restrict the free expression of the intelligentsia. Due to political disagreements about campus culture, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives, and how to handle student protests on campus, the government halted billions of dollars in federal subsidies to hundreds of universities (American Council on Education, 2025). Immigration Custom Enforcement (ICE) besieged and deported undocumented immigrants at this turbulent time, targeting democratic sanctuary cities. Since the paper was written, two fatalities have been reported: ICE agents fatally shot Renee Nicole Good on January 7, 2026, and Alex Pretti on January 24, 2026, in Minneapolis, USA. Widespread opposition existed from the start against ICE raids in U.S. cities (Epstein, 2026).

Reemergence of the (Don)Monroe Doctrine

The Monroe Doctrine of 1823 declared that there would be no new European colonization in the Americas; in theory, Latin America would be the U.S. nation-state's backyard. Any foreign intrusion would be viewed as a threat to national security (Gonzalez, 2022). As of September 2025, U.S. naval forces have been operating off the coast of Venezuela and Colombia. They began to systematically target presumably drug-smuggling boats in the Caribbean, with the killings of many (Rios, 2026). Trump also confirmed that he would explore options for conducting strikes on land targets in Venezuela, labeling the nation as a narco-terrorist threat. Trump also aimed at Colombia threatening President Gustavo Petro to close down drug operations and to watch his ax. This created a diplomatic breakdown with Colombia, recalling its ambassador (Telesur, 2025b).

On January 3rd, 2026, the U.S. Imperialist forces executed a contemporary slave-catching maneuver (Reichel, 1988) and initiated a forceful and violent special forces operation against the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. They apprehended and kidnapped President Nicolas Maduro Moros along with his spouse, first combatant Cilia Flores. The presidential couple was incarcerated

in Brooklyn, New York, USA, and faced narcoterrorism charges. The brutal operation resulted in the deaths of 47 Bolivarian soldiers, as well as 32 Cuban soldiers from the Ministry of the Interior and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Cuba, who were tasked with ensuring the security of President Maduro (Al Jazeera, 2026), in addition to numerous innocent civilians. The President of Cuba, Miguel Diaz-Canel, echoed the sentiments of a colonel who perished in combat, stating, " Only over my cadaver will they be able to take or assassinate the President [Maduro]" *Honor y Gloria* (Telesur, 2026). This act of aggression was carried out in direct violation of the United Nations Charter and International Law.

Reproduction of the Perpetual Foreigner

With so-called U.S. American exceptionalism against Mexico and the South, reinforced through violence, hatred, and the breakdown of humanity and a civil society, it is often the indignant and the underprivileged who endure various forms of antagonisms and violence. Throughout U.S. history, in times of nativist surges, the perpetual foreigner resurfaces and can be understood as a racist and a xenophobic form of racism where ethnic minorities are 'othered' in the U.S. (Healey & Stepnick, 2022; Gonzalez, 2022). The stereotype is often perpetuated through institutions, the media, and systemic biases, not just solely individual prejudice. What becomes prevalent is who is not U.S. American, and who is excluded from the national category (Barlow et al., 2000). This stereotype strips U.S. Americanness from people of ethnic groups (Huynh et al., 2011).

Holding The Line: Adult Education

The suffering endured by humanity fosters an awareness of injustice. During periods marked by violence, nativism, and intolerance, it is the responsibility of adult education to utilize its methodologies as a call to action for a humane, civil, and democratic society. As highlighted by Lai (1995), andragogy recognizes the vast experiences that adult learners contribute, which can provide significant teaching opportunities within the educational framework. As a result, individuals may find it challenging to truly connect with new ideas if their experiences are minimized or overlooked. Thus, neglecting these experiences constitutes a different form of institutional oppression; andragogy neither affirms nor negates experiences but rather encourages reflection on both contemporary and past experiences.

The true purpose of adult education has always been to promote democracy and an enlightened society, and it must continue to do so into the future. In

order to better prepare adult educators with critical awareness, it is essential to critically evaluate customs, various contexts, practices, and histories. This is necessary so that teachers can assist students in realizing that education necessitates choice and that informed students are necessary for that choice (Brown, 2010). According to Benavot et al. (2022), lifelong learning needs to cultivate moral settings that allow people from many knowledge traditions to interact, reciprocate, respect, be courteous, value, and acknowledge the "other." This should be accomplished through a 'sense of possibility' that supports learning as spiritually and politically healing, reflecting the human spirit's longing for life in a truly radical spiritual battle. In the dialectic of self and other, as well as in the dialectical framework of human agency, human action intertwines with spiritual significance and changes the soul (Kanpol, 1996).

Drawing Upon a Critical Theory of Adult Education

To make sense of a global society controlled by predatory corporations and dominated by technocratic and instrumental rationality, which consciously act to control the wider society and block deep historical collective enlightenment, empowerment, and transformative action, a critical theory of adult education supports that we should intentionally and concretely analyze how society functions as a school (Welton, 1991). By referencing a range of contexts, including the social, experience, learning, and awareness in the face of neoliberal reforms and the progression of an imperialist stage of capitalist development, Carpenter (2012) argues that a Marxist feminist approach should be anchored in adult education.

A Marxist approach to educational theory, according to Carpenter & Mojab (2022), draws on feminist, queer, anti-colonial, and anti-imperial theorization in addition to other shared histories within the larger Marxist tradition. A Marxist feminist perspective uses the global class relations of capitalism to analyze the particularities of gender, sex, and race. Marxist historical analysis is essential to the creation of a modern social analysis, according to Carpenter & Mojab (2023), who place a strong focus on history and the significance of historical processes and forces in comprehending reality.

Education is one of many places where hegemony can be renegotiated as part of a long revolution. A critical theory of adult learning should continue to advance a war of position that involves advances or retreats when translating working in and against the system, or, as stated in Brazil, being tactically inside and strategically outside the system (Mayo, 2005). In terms of militarism, industry, race, and gender relations, this is especially true of Trumpism and the neoliberal agenda (Mayo, 2021). Mayo also offers guidance on the value of

critically and dialectically interacting with status quo ideology and the ability to endure such tension. In line with the Gramscian concept of social transformation, which holds that dominant forms of thought and practice can be challenged in the vast arena of struggle for a civil society (Mayo, 2003).

According to Mayo (1995), Gramsci's conception of hegemony offers dialectical tools for examining the ways in which the ruling class aims to control social relations. The dominant culture in capitalist countries, on the other hand, normalizes social interactions that appear neutral and natural inside the market economy, and as such, this is the only sensible way for a society to be structured. To make the argument for the creation of more adult learning spaces that are critical, public, and socially committed, Borg & Mayo (2008) contend that hegemony is never absolute and that we must offer several instances of counter-hegemonic adult education both locally and globally that are critical, public, and socially committed. McLaren (1997) contends that practitioners and theorists are unable to critically engage with Marx's work because of the knee-jerk Marxophobia that permeates American adult education. Marxophobia maintains that even bringing up Marx is un-American and implicitly condones the repression and genocide committed by totalitarian communist governments across history.

In response, Brookfield (2001) argues that a critical theory of adult education must recognize the importance of Marxist ideas and be interpreted as a critical conversation with Marx. When it comes to commodification—the process by which human qualities or relationships are viewed as a product or good that can be purchased and sold on the open market—this becomes very necessary. Marx (2024) developed the theory of value and surplus labor, which holds that the portion of the workday where the worker creates value for which they are not paid is called surplus labor. The difference between necessary and surplus labor, as well as how capitalists take advantage of this excess value to boost their capital, is known as the commodification of labor power. The basis of capitalist exploitation, which is a direct disparity between the capitalist and the worker, is the appropriation of surplus value.

Marxism delivers a knockout punch through the critique of surplus value and labor in the U.S. as it relates to so-called undocumented immigrants. According to both the American Immigration Council & Institute of Taxation and Economic Policy (2025), in 2022, undocumented immigrants paid an estimated \$96.7 billion to 97 billion in federal, state, and local taxes. There was an estimated \$46.8 billion in federal taxes and \$29.3 billion in state and local taxes in 2022. Undocumented immigrants pay into social security and Medicare, where they contributed more than \$25 billion and \$6 billion, respectively, from

which they are largely ineligible to draw benefits. The wealthiest citizens in many states pay lower effective state and local taxes than undocumented immigrants. In 2023, the purchasing power of households with undocumented immigrants was \$299 billion. Additionally, in 2023, they paid more than \$167 billion in rent, which supports the housing market.

Reflection

In the past, fascism called for heedless loyalists and blind patriots who brought misery, death, and devastation to the world. We require a constructive sense of patriotism that challenges the nation-state (Lewin, 2013), with an internationalist consciousness, revealing a strong commitment to justice and equity for the greater good of society. According to McLaren & Monzo (2022), the only superpower in the world today employs its divinely mandated preemptive power to democratize rogue nations through the brutality of war, while symbolically highlighting the cultural inferiority of its new immigrant populations from the south.

In the context of education, Mayo (2023) recommends the implementation of a political economy-based anti-racist curriculum that incorporates economic history and cultural engagement. Additionally, it would also need to be based on a thorough understanding of colonialism. It is possible to cultivate social solidarity in a way that goes beyond borders created by humans. The critical consciousness-based flight of the imagination would extend over the entire world. A moral and humanistic Marxism should offer a radical hope for comprehending the continuous fight for the liberation of the poor, marginalized, exploited, oppressed, insignificant, and most hated within ethnocentric frameworks of capitalist societies (Zhixiong & Rowland, 2013). In the spirit of social justice for the common good.

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Confronting Nativist discourse: Drawing upon a Critical Theory of Adult Education for humanising antagonisms along the Mexico-US borderlands

Jesus Jaime-Diaz

Abstract

This paper examines the rise of anti-immigrant sentiment in the U. S. during the second Trump oligarchy, focusing on deportations of undocumented Mexican/Latina/o American immigrants, and the threat from *La Frontera*/Borderlands. It discusses nativist discourses aimed at immigrants. Affirmed is a transformative adult education reinforced through a critical history that confronts harmful rhetoric, promoting a democracy that empowers marginalized groups in the spirit of social justice for the common good.

Key words

nativism, borderlands, immigration, critical history, solidarity, internationalism, adult education

Lutter contre le discours nativiste: s' appuyer sur une théorie critique de la éducation des adultes pour humaniser les antagonismes le long de la frontièr entre le Mexique et les États-Unis.

Jesus Jaime-Diaz

Résumé

Cet article examine la montée du sentiment anti-immigrés aux États-Unis durant la seconde oligarchie Trump, en se concentrant sur les expulsions d'immigrés américains mexicains/latina/o sans papiers, ainsi que sur la menace provenant de La Frontera/Borderlands. Il analyse les discours nativistes visant les immigrants. Il affirme l'importance d'une éducation des adultes transformatrice, renforcée par une histoire critique qui affronte les rhétoriques nuisibles, en promouvant une démocratie qui autonomise les groupes marginalisés dans l'esprit de la justice sociale pour le bien commun.

Mots clés

nativisme, région frontalière, immigration, histoire critique, solidarité, internationalisme, éducation des adultes

Como afrontar el discurso nativista: recurriendo a una teoría crítica de la educación de adultos para humanizar los antagonismos en la frontera entre el Mexico y Estado Unidos

Jesus Jaime-Diaz

Resumen

Este artículo examina el auge del sentimiento antiinmigrante en los EE. UU. durante la segunda oligarquía de Trump, centrándose en las deportaciones de inmigrantes indocumentados Mexicano/Latina/o Americanos y en la amenaza desde La Frontera/Borderlands. Analizan los discursos nativistas dirigidos contra los inmigrantes. Se afirma una educación de adultos transformadora, reforzada a través de una historia crítica que confronta la retórica dañina, promoviendo una democracia que empodera a los grupos marginados en el espíritu de la justicia social para el bien común.

Palabras clave

nativismo, tierras fronterizas, inmigración, historia crítica, solidaridad, internacionalismo, educación de adultos