



Border Patrol Nation: Dispatches from the Front Lines of Homeland Security

Todd Miller

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Armed authorities watch from a military-grade surveillance tower as lines of people stream toward the security checkpoint, tickets in hand, anxious and excited to get through the gate. Few seem to notice or care that the US Border Patrol is monitoring the Super Bowl, as they have for years, one of the many ways that forces created to police the borders are now being used, in an increasingly militarized fashion, to survey and monitor the whole of American society.

In fast-paced prose, Todd Miller sounds an alarm as he chronicles the changing landscape. Traveling the country—and beyond—to speak with the people most involved with and impacted by the Border Patrol, he combines these first-hand encounters with careful research to expose a vast and booming industry for high-end technology, weapons, surveillance, and prisons. While politicians and corporations reap substantial profits, the experiences of millions of men, women, and children point to staggering humanitarian consequences. *Border Patrol Nation* shows us in stark relief how the entire country has become a militarized border zone, with consequences that affect us all.

Todd Miller has worked on US border issues for over fifteen years. His writing has appeared in the *New York Times*, *Mother Jones*, and elsewhere.

"[Miller] offers a vision of what the military-industrial complex looks like once it's transported, jobs and all, to the US–Mexican border and turned into a consumer mall for the post-9/11 era . . . [it's] a striking and original picture."--Tom Engelhardt, *TomDispatch*

"What Jeremy Scahill was to Blackwater, Todd Miller is to the U.S. Border Patrol!"--Tom Miller, author, *On the Border: Portraits of America's Southwestern Frontier*

"Miller's book is a fascinating read. . . . and bring the work of Susan Orlean to mind."--Amanda Eyre Ward *Kirkus Reviews*

"Todd Miller has entered a secret world, and he has gone deep. If you want to learn about the Border Patrol's world, you will find this book informative and startling. I'm not sure the Border Patrol will like all that he has to say. But his is a moral work that wrestles with a huge story. Powerful."--Luis Alberto Urrea, author of *The Devil's Highway: A True Story*

"Journalist Miller tells an alarming story of U.S. Border Patrol and Homeland Security's ever-widening reach into the lives of American citizens and legal immigrants as well as the undocumented. In addition to readers interested in immigration issues, those concerned about the NSA's privacy violations will likely be even more shocked by the actions of Homeland Security."--*Publishers Weekly*, Starred Review

"Todd Miller's book *Border Patrol Nation* has some eye-opening reporting, especially for those of us who live along the border and think we know the facts of the expanding police state."--Charles Bowden, author of *Murder City: Ciudad Juárez and the Global Economy's New Killing Field*

"The U.S. needs a reality check about its border with Mexico, and none need it more than the Congress. I wish every member could get a copy of *Border Patrol Nation*, and see up close the impact of a quarter century of increasing enforcement and militarization."--David Bacon, author, *The Right to Stay Home: How U.S. Policy Drives Mexican Migration*

"Miller reveals the humanity of both the victims and the victimizers, and the inhumanity of the system. A fantastic book."--Medea Benjamin, co-founder of Code Pink and author of *Drone Warfare: Killing by Remote Control*

"It is a book that frightens and inspires, and one that demands a wide audience. Miller's message is one we ignore at our peril."--Joseph Nevins, author of *Operation Gatekeeper and Beyond: The War on "Illegals" and the Remaking of the U.S.-Mexico Boundary*

Border Patrol Nation: Dispatches from the Front Lines of Homeland Security Details

Date : Published April 8th 2014 by City Lights Publishers (first published February 21st 2014)

ISBN : 9780872866317

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Format : Paperback 358 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, North American Hi..., American History



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Stuart says

Skip this if you're looking for a polished review. These were my personal thoughts on the book.

I fully expected the book to be 'sensationalism' but right away realized it was just a sensational heart felt book with good references, and an extremely important message. If you think we are living through the erosion of our civil liberties and read books like 'The New Jim Crow', or 'Mexico Unconquered' you will still probably find startling revelations in the same vein.

It is deeply saddening that so many 'Americans' (from the U.S) are on board and gung-ho with the institutionalization of racism that is rapidly expanding in the form of border control and us against them mind sets. Didn't we learn anything collectively from Chinese exclusion, or Japanese internment?

Some parts that stood out to me were the totalitarian nature of the border patrol when firing one of there own because he voiced support for socialism, and an end to the war on drugs to a co-worker. Or another CBP agent that was held suspect by his peers for not owning a gun.

The lack of humanity and disdain that is shown toward victims as if they were less than feral animals. The ever-present mentality of 'manifest destiny'.

Mr Miller covers a lot of topics in a short easy to read book. From how the nature of borders has been extended all over the world to Edward Snowden, and privacy.

I highly recommend this book. And I totally hate the direction our country is spiraling toward. I want to immigrate away it is so shameful.

Ryan Miller says

Miller's research seems credible and his storytelling is touching. By talking with a wide variety of players at and around the border, he presents a number of viewpoints. I'd be surprised if there are many readers that cannot find a voice that they had not heretofore heard. In this day of oversimplistic border rhetoric, Miller's description of the Border Patrol police state becomes an even more powerful piece of knowledge, with plenty of reasons to mourn.

Holly says

After Pastor Max Villatoro from our local community was deported to Honduras recently, I went in search of books to help me understand what had happened. How a father of four American kids, who is legally employed and who serves his community as a pastor, could be forcibly taken from his home and family despite a massive national effort to protest his deportation is enough to drive a person to despair. Miller's book illuminates the militarization of America's creeping border patrol in post-9/11 America and the

psychology that drives its cruelties with stories or "dispatches" from around the country--Florida, the Carolinas, New Mexico, and Michigan, to name a few of the places featured. Miller's book isn't all despairing, though. He ends with stories of resistance by regular people, signs of hope amidst a system that otherwise seems to have lost any moral bearings.

Maryc says

So disturbing. The police state is already here and god bless the resistance! Homeland "Security" is using the cover of preventing terrorism to target and attack people of color, activists, journalists and academics, as well as jailing and deporting hundreds of thousands of migrants each year. Customs and "Border" Patrol do not have to follow constitutional guidelines as other law enforcement do. For at least 100 miles in from every border (encompassing whole states in some cases), the constitution has been suspended. The fiscal priority of pouring money into more and more violent Big Brother police state apparatus, rather than lifting up the poor, homeless, elderly, and other vulnerable members of society, is not questioned in the halls of congress. However, after yet another homegrown white guy terrorist attack in Las Vegas...we still pound the war drums and increase the fear factor toward the "other" so that we no longer act with compassion or welcome as a nation.

Jeff says

A story that deserves and needs to be told. The author shows immense courage and deep sensitivity in shining a light on the darkness, racism and abuses of the US Border Patrol who act without the constitutional limitations of other law enforcement groups. This a very big story that has, for too long, flown under the radar of the media and US historians. Thank you, Todd Miller.

Nicolas Adame says

Let me begin by saying that I REALLY wanted to give this book a chance, honestly, I did; but the pictures Mr. Miller paints in this book is unbearable. The entire premise of this book centers around the thought that we Americans give up to many of our individual freedoms on a day to day basis in order to have protection.

Throughout the book, the US Border Patrol is seen as some 1984-type big brother agency with it's sole intention being to deprive you of your rights. This simply isn't true, and is rather unbearable to read. Another thing the author does is he takes us to various border worlds. The book starts and ends at the Super Bowl, which he likens to a showpiece for public-private policing and for the creation of entertainment from border enforcement. He takes us to his hometown of Niagara Falls, which is across an increasingly policed line from Canada. He brings us to the sovereign lands of the Tohono O'odham nation, where locals estimate that the majority of resident have suffered abuses at the hands of border agents. He also takes us to the Dominican Republic, where U.S. Customs and Border Patrol plays a role in ensuring the border with Haiti is strictly enforced. All of this is completely irrelevant when talking about our borders back home

Overall, save you time and go watch paint dry. It will definitely have a more positive effect on your life than this book.

Jenifer says

Devastating...the police state is here. Resist.

Deborah says

A terrifying read of the unimaginable power the Border Patrol has within the US (and somehow also without). Civil and human rights are violated without question, and an incredible amount of money is wasted to do so which could be far better applied in supporting communities rather than tearing them apart. There is no justification for this to be allowed without any semblance of transparency, and Miller presents well-researched reasons why any American should be pretty damn angry about it.

Sylvia Longmire says

It's hard not to assume what ideological track a book is going to take when it repeatedly uses the terms "militarization" and "social control" in its first chapters when referring to the US Border Patrol. And indeed, author Todd Miller comes across as someone with a serious bone to pick as he portrays agents and officers working along our nation's international borders as soldiers almost akin to Nazi Germany's Gestapo.

He opens up his new book, titled *Border Patrol Nation*, by detailing US Customs and Border Protection's (CBP) involvement in providing security for the past dozen or so Super Bowl games. This is not a huge secret; CBP publishes several press releases each year explaining how CBP works in collaboration with state and local police, as well as the Department of Defense, to enforce no-fly zones over the stadiums and conduct security checks of vehicles entering the stadium parking areas. The agency participates only at the request of the federal government, and it brings to the table many resources that the locals don't have or can't acquire before the big game.

But because agents are enforcing federal immigration laws in Super Bowl locations like Miami and Phoenix, this somehow characterizes CBP's role as one of an intrusive and human rights-violating paramilitary organization. Oddly enough, he highlights this unique mission in a way that says, Can you believe you didn't know about this? Unfortunately for Miller, the fact that few people probably know about CBP's involvement in Super Bowl security—and the dearth of irate liberal media coverage about it—implies that maybe their actions really aren't intrusive at all. Considering how long they've been doing it, it's interesting he comes across as the first to "break" this story, even though the media has written about it before.

This is just the start of a book that feels all over the place with regard to Miller's criticisms of the border security "complex." This isn't to say that he doesn't provide solid information; he interviewed many of the same people I did for *Border Insecurity*, like Glenn Spencer of American Border Patrol and Bruce Wright at the University of Arizona Tech Park. The interviews themselves and the statistics and descriptions of various aspects of border security, like the virtual border fence and border-related conferences, are accurate enough. He also does a good job of explaining the burgeoning border security industry, including the billions of dollars being spent on research and development of new technology and the growth of small companies seeking a piece of this ever-growing pie.

However, Miller's liberal ideology frequently gets in the way of what had the potential to be a decent analysis of the expansion of Border Patrol's presence in the United States. He provides a considerable number of anecdotes from illegal immigrants and residents of the Tohono O'odham Tribal Nation where they claim they were verbally or physically harassed or abused by Border Patrol agents, and the stories are very emotionally intense and convincing. Miller cites reports by the United Nations and human rights organizations that condemn the agency's alleged excessive use of force, but he doesn't say if the victims he spoke to ever reported the incidents to other US authorities or filed a formal complaint with CBP.

Despite the picture he paints of the Tribal Nation as being under the thumb of an oppressive border agency, Miller does give a factual account of the high rate of Nation residents involved in drug and human smuggling. When I worked as an intelligence analyst in northern California many years ago, I had already started hearing how the Nation would accept payments from the cartels to move drugs through the impoverished reservation, and how tribal police tended to be uncooperative with other law enforcement agencies. As a Tucson resident, those perceptions definitely persist, and I was disheartened to read about Tohono O'odham youth getting involved with smugglers, as typical this is for a cartel recruiting venture.

Unfortunately, Miller swings back to being ideologically one-sided when he moves into his chapter about the northern border. He writes extensively about Mexican and other minority populations being profiled and targeted by the Border Patrol in Detroit, but doesn't cite any demographic statistics regarding the estimated population of illegal immigrants in the city. If 80 percent of Detroit's illegal immigrant population were white and 70 percent of deportees were people of color, then Miller would have a serious point to consider. However, without context, we're left to base our conclusions on Miller's assumptions alone.

He also focuses his northern border chapter mostly on illegal immigrants and his view that DHS surveillance is seriously overreaching. But he never once touches upon the insane amount of illicit cross-border trafficking occurring along the St Clair and Detroit rivers, to include illegal drugs and large volumes of cash heading in both directions. The "thumb" area of Michigan is notorious for small single-engine planes loaded with drugs flying across the border outside of national radar coverage, and the response time of CBP boats on the river often isn't fast enough to tackle the heavy smuggling activity there. Miller mentions none of this in relation to the reason CBP has increased its presence along our northern border.

Miller is a good writer; that's definitely not the underlying problem with Border Patrol Nation. His stories are engaging and the reading is easy. However, structurally there is little to no flow, and he doesn't make any direct points or specifically state the main thesis of the book until the last few pages. Even then, his argument is that "according to today's Homeland Security regime all but the elite and all-powerful few should be monitored as a potential threat." He states both implicitly and explicitly throughout the book that the existence and expansion of the Border Patrol is equivalent to an imperialistic and racist attempt to divide the American people in the "have and have-nots" and the "global North and global South."

Furthermore, Miller wonders how our government can spend so much money on border security while looking away from the economy, poverty, and homelessness. He offers little to nothing by way of a solution, other than the generic "resistance." He talks about a cyclist who lay down under a Border Patrol vehicle to protest the apprehension of an illegal immigrant. But his entire book merely sends the general message that "the Border Patrol is evil" without seriously acknowledging that violent drug smugglers and criminals are crossing our borders illegally every day, attacking US law enforcement on a regular basis, and raping and assaulting on US soil the very illegal immigrants he champions.

Ultimately, Border Patrol Nation comes across as a call for open borders, paints the US Border Patrol as an agency filled with agents who have little regard for human and civil rights of both US and "non-citizens,"

and offers no alternative to securing our borders from those who mean to do us harm other than protest or civil resistance. Miller's pleasant writing style and expertise is overshadowed by his very clear bias, and he will turn off a lot of readers who could learn a lot from his work simply because he's writing for an audience that shares his liberal viewpoint.

victor harris says

After a somewhat slow start, the author gains momentum and delivers a blistering critique of the increasingly expanding security state. Under the pretext of protecting the borders, various government agencies and enforcement units have swollen beyond any credible or manageable standard and have extended their reach into the privacy of many American citizens. Now as part of the military-industrial complex, the Border Patrol has seen a huge surge in growth and funding and manufactures more detentions to justify such outlays. Needless to say, private businesses are strong advocates of such policies as government contracts are abundant for feeding such an enterprise.

Whether it is the Canadian or Mexican border, citizenship and documentation is no protection against the intrusive tentacles of the Border Patrol and affiliated law enforcement entities. Puerto Ricans (American citizens) are classified as "Mexicans" and deported, and states such as South Carolina refuse to recognize their citizenship status and deny them driver's licenses. The book details a litany of other abuses that have become routine as the hydra of Homeland Security continues on its merry or not so merry way.

Includes full citations of funding, detentions, and deportations as well as a run down of the who's who in the security game. Appalling and highly recommended for anyone interested in the topic.

Kristine says

Border Patrol Nation by Todd Miller is a free LibraryThing Early Reviewers advance reader copy of a paperback book I actually received twice; the one I've read and reviewed was sent from San Francisco's famed City Lights Books, because, hey, that's awesome.

Border Patrol Nation covers issues and histories of the borders at Arizona, Texas, Detroit, Niagara Falls, and the Dominican Republic; all the while taking a very technical, police/paramilitary-speak, world news tone. I most gravitated toward the chapters that had to do with the Explorers (the Border Patrol youth league) and people who had political vested interest in border policy, but had a foot in the country that the U.S. is bordered with (mostly family that frequently make crossings that have been arrested and/or been in custody for doing so).

Thomas Garcia says

Todd Miller is the real deal. Finally, after living my entire life in the US-Mexico borderlands, I have found a book that both clearly and comprehensively tackles the problem of border patrol militarization and surveillance. Weaving personal anecdotes with facts, Miller lays out the wide-ranging, detrimental impacts of increased patrols, "self-policing," and the exponential amount of funding granted to the border patrol.

Whether you're new to the issue of border security or have lived it like myself, you should definitely read this book.

Bri Taylor says

Incredibly researched. Brilliant insight into how the militarization of CBD / ICE has changed the frontiers of American borders for migrant families and potential citizens. Insightful, powerful, important.

Naomi says

A powerful review of how Americans are sacrificing free speech and freedom of movement in the name of securing our borders, the resisters to this, and the appeals made for ever greater internal controls and surveillance. Recommended for individuals and communities concerned about human rights and true freedoms, especially those engaging in making peace real and working for humane comprehensive immigration reform.

Tinea says

Miller does an excellent job combining facts and research with an overarching thesis and story. Miller documents bizarrely sadistic and arbitrary border policing incidents, and through his research (and breadth of interviews) is able to connect it to high-level BP policies in hiring, training, and enforcement.

The book takes a sharp look at different aspects of the US Border Patrol, to demonstrate how the BP acts with impunity, without constitutional accountability and outside the checks-and-balances judicial system, to systematically police borders based on race and perceived identity. What do I mean by 'perceived identity'? For example, Miller documents cases of US citizens being 'deported' to foreign countries without money, phone calls, or other basic logistics (which is how the US deports everyone, without care towards survival post-deportation) because their language or race or association marked them as 'foreign' to a white-supremacist system. Similarly, he documents harassment and detention of US citizens of Arab descent whose present-day treatment echoes the US government's choice to treat Japanese immigrant and Japanese-descended citizens as associated with enemy combatants during WWII.

Because it is exempt from many of the laws that govern policing in the US, the beefed up, post-9/11 Border Patrol acts as a supplementary, para-military police force, on call to other agencies whose rules of engagement are more restricted by the constitution. The true weight of the book comes across towards the end, when several distinct chapters on border policing along the Canadian border, at checkpoints in the interior US, and in BP training programs abroad in countries like Dominican Republic, all comes together to paint a "border" that is not a physical barrier between one country and the next, but a globalized tool to manage movement of labor and 'undesirable' people. Profit-driven immigration detention centers with quotas for how many beds the government must keep full at all times, the timing of immigration raids for *after* harvest seasons, and the desire of rightwing politicians for restricted work visas instead of immigration all add up to a picture of a corporate-controlled, exploitative system. The book builds slowly but gets pretty intense.

Unfortunately, I felt like Miller undermined the book's well-grounded research with extraneous editorializing. It is hard to toe the line between emotional connection and care for your subject plus easy-to-read

relateability without going overboard into ranting. Miller didn't always succeed, to the point where I would hesitate to give this book to someone who did not already agree that Border Patrol is abusive. Despite the evidence, the occasionally rambling stories that present the evidence can be distracting. This book feels like a tool for campaigners who need facts and a framework to back up their experiences, but not a campaign tool in itself. Maybe not: I'm a little too biased myself to have a good feel for what an outside observer needs for convincing.
