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Border Hysteria and the War against Difference

Guillermo Gómez-Peña

"Watch out locos! Godzilla in a mariachi hat could be an Al-Qaeda operative."

In this piece, performance artist and writer Guillermo Gómez-Peña articulates a passionate defense of "undocumented" immigrants, post-national identity, and a multiracial USA. This text-in-progress is part of the borderless movement of citizen journalism circulating in cyberspace.

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In October 2006, King George signed a bill authorizing the construction of an additional "border security" wall spanning one-third of the US-Mexican border. The plan was to build a concrete wall replete with floodlights, surveillance cameras, and motion detectors. On the front-page photo of Mexico's daily *La Jornada*, George W. and a group of opportunistic governors and politicians from the southwestern states stand posed before a postcard-perfect Arizona landscape. The President sat at a table signing the bill, his sycophantic groupies fanned about him, gawking and gaping like backstage groupies. It was pure performance art for electoral purposes. The photo was published

throughout Latin America and caused general outrage.

I asked myself: "Who is going to build that pinchewall—undocumented migrants hired by Halliburton?"¹

A month later, Congress approved the proposal—the same week they squashed habeas corpus. Una mera coincidencia?

Outside this country of the US everyone asks: "Why does the US need more walls and more isolationistic politics? Aren't they isolated enough already?" But within our borders Washington incessantly chants: "National security! Homeland security!" More walls, laws, and border patrols!

The master narrative of US national security (as written by the neocons in collaboration with the mainstream media) reads: "Muslim radicals are out to get 'us'; 'illegal aliens' are out to take 'our' jobs. We, victims of the wrath of history, are merely innocent bystanders. Our only crime is our belief in freedom and democracy." This strategic deployment of the rhetoric of victimization and of heroism and of moral panic clearly justifies both the tightening of our

1. See *New York Times* (2006).

Guillermo Gómez-Peña is a performance artist and writer residing in San Francisco, where he is artistic director of La Pocha Nostra. Born in 1955 and raised in Mexico City, he came to the US in 1978 to study post-studio art at Cal Arts. His pioneering work in performance, video, installation, poetry, journalism, cultural theory, and radical pedagogy explores cross-cultural issues, immigration, the politics of language, "extreme culture," and new technologies. A MacArthur Fellow and American Book Award winner, he is a regular contributor to National Public Radio, a writer for newspapers and magazines in the US, Mexico, and Europe, and a TDR Contributing Editor.