

The following book review was previously published as:

Avant-Mier, R. (2002). *Shifting Borders: Proposition 187 and the rhetoric of immigration* by K.A. Ono, and J.M. Sloop. *Southern Communication Journal*, 68, 72-73.

Kent A. Ono and John M. Sloop, SHIFTING BORDERS: RHETORIC, IMMIGRATION, AND CALIFORNIA'S PROPOSITION 187. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2002; pp. 253, \$64.50 hardcover, ISBN: 1566399165, \$19.95 paper, ISBN 1566399173.

California's Proposition 187 sought to eliminate public services like education, health care, and welfare services to illegal immigrants. The proposal stirred up so much controversy that it in fact became a national issue, and Kent Ono and John Sloop show us that there are still important lessons for scholars to take away from it. In *Shifting Borders*, Ono and Sloop have teamed up again to investigate the discourse surrounding Prop. 187, and by extension, the larger implications that various discourses have and can have on political and social life. As they more adeptly stated in the introductory chapter, "this book examines the rhetoric of migration by focusing on contemporary media representations of migration in the United States and, more specifically, on the rhetoric surrounding Proposition 187" (p. 1). In this first chapter, the authors set up the framework for a discussion that tells the reader quite a bit about how the discursive "game" is played.

In the second chapter the authors address "civic rhetoric" about immigration that can be uncovered within national media sources such as *U.S. News and World Report*, *Economist*, the *New York Times*, and evening newscasts of the major networks (respectively). One example of this shows how discourse often framed the issue in terms of immigrants-as-economic-units. What Ono & Sloop call our attention to is the fact that whether one was for or against Prop. 187, discussing human beings as economic units exerted a dominant logic of capital that will always subordinate various groups within a capitalist society and more importantly, subordinate the humanity relating to the issue. In this sense, arguing against Prop. 187 from within a civic rhetoric/dominant logic was not any more helpful to the cause as it was a situation in which the rules of the game were always already set up to work against a certain team. In other examples, the authors show how engaging the discussion in terms of criminality, im/morality, and disease serve as discursive frames that function as set rules that in turn restrict any other kind of "play" on the issue.

In the third and fourth chapters, the authors continue the analysis with a turn toward regional discourses. What is revealed in these "shifty" discourses are complex articulations of nativism in terms of the nation, the border, the Mexican flag, identity, history and invasion, legality and illegality, state versus federal responsibility, constitutionality, bilingualism, citizenship, and protest. As Ono & Sloop astutely observe, "These questions about labor, power, memory, culture, history, identity, colonialism, and resistance necessarily maintain an antagonism that goes well beyond simply being for or against a single ballot initiative" (p. 71). What these things speak to is the power of discourse to frame issues in ways that implicate the same people that might be formulating arguments against a Prop. 187. The insight provided is significant in the way it shows people to be complicit, perhaps hegemonically implicated, in discourses that actually serve the anti-immigrant sentiment of dominant logics and civic rhetorics.

By chapter five, Ono and Sloop have turned the critical lens onto such complicity and resistance in relation to “vernacular” discourses where more local conversations surrounding Prop. 187 took place. More specifically, the lens examines e-mail messages posted to an e-mail distribution list devoted to defeating Prop. 187. As the authors argue and explain, although an easy assumption would be that such vernacular discourses, especially one devoted to defeating the proposition, would serve as resistant discourses, the actual result is that certain vernacular discourses are in fact complicit with “logical assumptions produced within dominant discourses” (p. 115).

To some degree, the examples of these discourses are so plentiful that it appears to be overkill of the argument at certain points. In fact, one of the few weaknesses of the book might be the specificity and number of examples of discourses that the authors have presented in this book. Yet, to their credit, the authors have carefully crafted a book that awakens the reader to theoretical issues just when the examples start to be too much. Likewise, just when the theoretical base might be too abstract, the authors return with more examples of discourses that specifically reveal the extent to which discourses influence and determine perceptions of an issue. A definite strength of the book is the theoretical trajectory in chapter six (based on the first chapter) that examines the position of resistant “outlaw” discourses, local “vernacular” discourses, public “civic” discourses, and dominant “unquestioned” discourses, as well as all of their possible intersections.

In what might be a more fruitful discussion, the concluding chapter encourages readers and scholars by calling attention to the importance of analyzing both dominant and vernacular discourses/logics for the purpose of engaging in more “complex and useful” (p. 160) discussions on any issue in contemporary culture. In complete agreement with the authors, this book is an accomplishment as “a tool kit of sorts for thinking through the many aspects of social change in contemporary postmodern spaces” (p. 161).

For students of rhetoric and speech communication, this book has enough of the requisite rhetorical vocabulary to make it worthwhile as a lesson in rhetorical analysis and “the Posts” in rhetorical criticism. Ethos, pathos, logos, mythos are functional terms while others like “fragmentation” (McGee, 1990), “critical rhetoric” (McKerrow, 1991), “vernacular discourse” (Ono & Sloop, 1995) are also concepts that are engaged to some extent. For students of mass communication, this book also addresses issues for newspapers and network news, and hence, serves as a valuable lesson in media studies. More importantly, this investigation provides students of communication with an important look into the how public and supposedly value-free media actually operate. In that sense as well, *Shifting Borders* becomes a lesson in the function of hegemony. Students of critical and cultural studies should therefore find this work an excellent example of the operations of ideology and hegemony in contemporary societies and everyday lives. In other words, what Ono & Sloop provide is a real-life investigation of exactly how hegemony and ideology happen.

To put a finer point on it, *Shifting Borders* reaches across the vast realm that is scholarship of/in/about Communication. It is a credit to these two authors that they have managed to grasp the significance of media, communication, language, discourse, and rhetoric in a way that makes their research applicable to people across the discipline and perhaps, across disciplines.

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