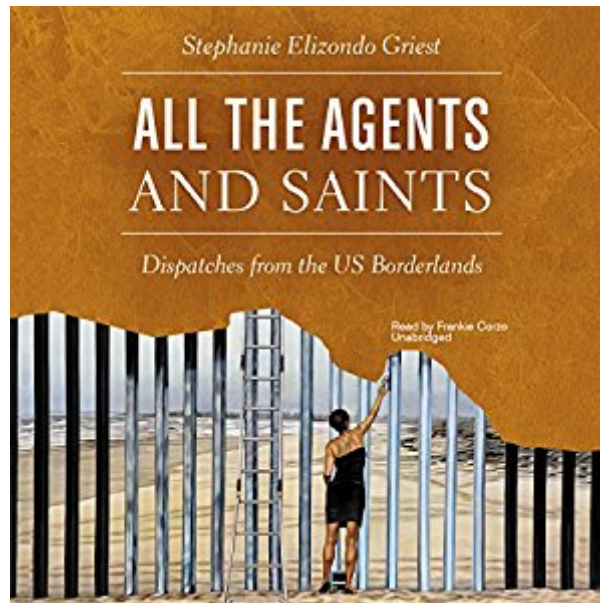




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# All The Agents And Saints: Dispatches From The US Borderlands



## Synopsis

After a decade of chasing stories around the globe, intrepid travel writer Stephanie Elizondo Griest followed the magnetic pull home - only to discover that her native South Texas had been radically transformed in her absence. Ravaged by drug wars and barricaded by an 18-foot steel wall, her ancestral land had become the nation's foremost crossing ground for undocumented workers, many of whom perished along the way. The frequency of these tragedies seemed like a terrible coincidence, before Elizondo Griest moved to the New York-Canada borderlands. Once she began to meet Mohawks from the Akwesasne Nation, however, she recognized striking parallels to life on the southern border. Having lost their land through devious treaties, their mother tongues at English-only schools, and their traditional occupations through capitalist ventures, Tejanos and Mohawks alike struggle under the legacy of colonialism. Toxic industries surround their neighborhoods while the US Border Patrol militarizes them. Combating these forces are legions of artists and activists devoted to preserving their indigenous cultures. Complex belief systems, meanwhile, conjure miracles. In *All the Agents and Saints*, Elizondo Griest weaves seven years of stories into a meditation on the existential impact of international borderlines by illuminating the spaces in between and the people who live there.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

A thoughtful and eye-opening reporting of recent conditions on two borders, Texas and Mexico and New York State and the Mohawk nation that straddles the US and Canada and citizens who have long lived there.

A set of stories about U.S. borders both in the north and in the south. Stephanie Elizondo compares the borderlands between New York and Canada to the borderlands between Texas and Mexico. She was inspired to write this book after meeting Mohawks of the Akwesasne Nation. She writes with passion about the loss of cultural identity that the Mohawks suffered when they lost their mother tongue, and had to give up their "traditional occupations through capitalist ventures." She also describes the activists that are striving to preserve their culture through practice and theory. According to an interview with the author that was included with my review copy, the title refers to "(Border Patrol) agents and (Catholic saints) the twin protectorates of our nation" "cs borderlands." These titles are used with negative connotations, as Griest sees both Christianity and the U.S. government agents as oppressing the native cultures of America and their religions and natural/ ancient borders. The book is divided into two parts, one on the Texas-Mexico border and the second on the New York-Canada border. Within these she has chapters on activists, agents, the Wall, trade, and native languages. Some of the titles are less clear and leave a reader wondering what might be within, such as "The Chokepoint" or "The Healing." Is the first about a homicidal choking? Is the second about a shaman healer? As I started looking closer I noticed that the second note from the Prologue refers to the word, "Dumbest." This is a quote from Craig Wilson "cs "Looking for Signs of Intelligent Life in Fort Wayne" article in 2005 in USA Today. Griest uses it as an example of the various insults that have been directed at her home town of Fort Wayne by the media, which include it being "America's fattest city" and this assertion that it is America's least "literate" city. She is not disputing the lack of literacy here, but rather sets out to discover, "How all of this came to be" (2). Her argument is that institutional racism and suppression of the native peoples' cultures is what lead to them being pushed out of the American marketplace, while they also cannot maintain their own traditional market structure. The bulk of the text comes from interviews Griest did with people who experienced problems in the borderlands. For example, in "The Woman in the Woods" chapter, Griest describes a third-person account of a women traveling across the border: "He finally parked beneath a mesquite tree and everyone climbed out. The pinche checkpoint is up ahead, the coyote might have said. We have to go around it, just a few miles, no problem" (115). This

is an example of a slightly fictionalized account that inserts researched assumptions of what happened into the woman's account. The bulk of the book is similarly colorful and educational in its descriptions. It should be a very beneficial read to any scholar of the borderlands as well as to anybody who wants to cross these lands. Are they coming to a better place, or to a nightmare that will suppress their spirit, culture and economic

mobility?

Pennsylvania Literary Journal: Volume IX, Issue 2, Interview with Carol Reardon, Battlefield Guide and Professor

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