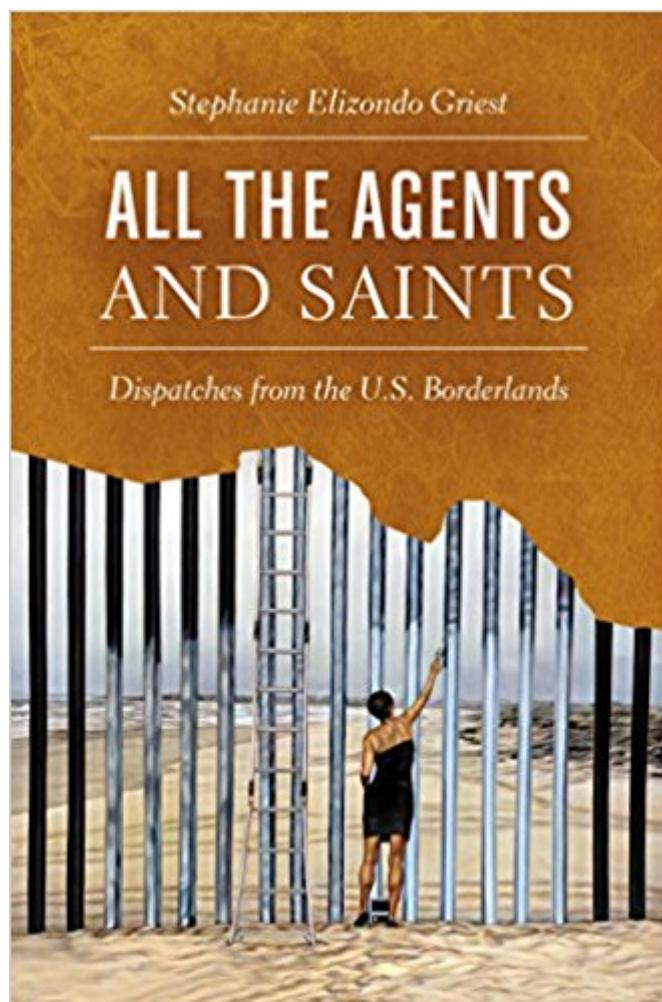


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# All The Agents And Saints: Dispatches From The U.S. Borderlands



## 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 eighteen-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 U.S. 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

Offers much more than just a very smart and companionable tour of the country's ragged edges. It offers a model for how a curious person, any person who is sufficiently interested, can begin to navigate the boundaries that compartmentalize our country, and ourselves, toward

wholeness.--Brad Tyer, *Texas Observer*An exploration of the borderlands that deftly mixes memoir, groundbreaking sociology, deep reporting, and compelling writing. . . . Demonstrates unforgettably that national borders constitute much more than lines on a map.--Kirkus Reviews, starred reviewBuilds a potent case for the erasure of arbitrary borderlines. This work of exploration and reporting is a timely reflection on the meaning and nature of much-discussed national boundaries.--BooklistElizondo Griest glimpses the modern immigrant experience through the lives of people who live in more than one culture. . . . Wrestles with profound questions of identity and belonging in a constantly shifting and increasingly unstable world.--Publishers WeeklyA must-read for anyone interested in the history of North America, its borderlands and their repercussions.--Chapel Hill MagazineWith sensitivity and eye-opening detail, [Elizondo Griest's] dispatches reveal both the pain and strength of borderlands people.--Shelf Awareness

Stephanie Elizondo Griest takes the reader with her on an exploratory journey that examines the histories and lifestyles within the Borderlands. Her stories are colorful and descriptive, and it's refreshing to see a writer become engaged within our community as an independent third party.--Brian David, former subchief of the Mohawk Council of AkwesasneAll the Agents and SaintsÂ is a beautiful book thatÂ takes us into the world of contemporary borderlands in a way that both breaks the heart and heals it. Only a seasoned travel writer like Stephanie Elizondo Griest could succeed so wonderfully in turning a journey to both the northern and southern borders of the United States into a profound meditation on the meaning of home and homecoming in an age of unprecedented global displacement. A stunning book with an urgent message of peace for our times.--Ruth Behar, author ofÂ *Traveling Heavy* and *Translated Woman*Stephanie Elizondo Griest complicates everything we think we know about immigration, migration, and life on a borderâ "where survival and legacy intersect with race, policy, and the unearthly divine. Elizondo Griest writes with such elegance and authenticity that she'll make you understand how arbitrary borders that are meant to divide people, cultures, governments, and even ideas can sometimes be the very places we find each other. A luminous and urgent story.--Rachel Louise Snyder, author ofÂ *Fugitive Denim*Â andÂ *What We've Lost Is Nothing*Elizondo Griest travels fearlessly and openly, compelling us to face the realities of the leaking wound at the borders between the United States, Mexico, and Canada. We see their physical boundaries, their artistic reinventions, their scanner-eyed objectifying patrols, and, most of all, their borderlands people. What makes these dispatches worthy are their humanity and brutal power. A blazing, page-turning, groundbreaking, soul-illuminating book.--Juan Felipe Herrera, Poet Laureate of the United States

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.<sup>1</sup> 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's borderlands.<sup>2</sup> 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".<sup>3</sup> 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".<sup>4</sup> This is a quote from Craig Wilson's "Looking for Signs of Intelligent Life in Fort Wayne"<sup>5</sup> 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 problemÃ¢Â• (115). This is an example of a slightly fictionalized account that inserts researched assumptions of what happened into the womanÃ¢Â™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?Ã¢Â”Pennsylvania Literary Journal: Volume IX, Issue 2, Interview with Carol Reardon, Battlefield Guide and Professor

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