

Communication and the Rhetoric of Fear: An Analysis of Protest Signs and Slogans Used in the Arizona Immigration Law Debate

by Hilda Escalera
Intercultural Communication

Rationale

The dichotomy between those who oppose the integration of undocumented immigrants within the dominant culture and those who welcome their co-cultural differences is reflected in the socio-politics of contemporary U.S. culture.

Research Questions:

- 1: What ideologies do the slogans and signs used in protest rhetoric pertaining to the Arizona immigration law promote about immigrants in the United States?
- 2: How do the anti-immigration protestors, through their signs and other protest discourse, attempt to define "immigrant"?
2. What ideologies are emphasized through the way these images are portrayed in the media?

Background

- April 23, 2010-Governor Jan Brewer of Arizona signed Senate Bill 1070 into law
- Today nearly two-thirds of Arizona voters (64%) said they favor the state's toughened immigration rules -Rasmussen Reports poll released on April 28 (ASU)

Method: Ideological Critique

Ideology can have an assortment of meanings that refer to beliefs that are built upon central values that have political value (Zevallos 1).

Rhetorical artifacts are examined to determine a particular belief system.

Artifacts for Study

- Six signs and slogans used in protests from conservative websites and blogs
- One artifact illustrated in this presentation

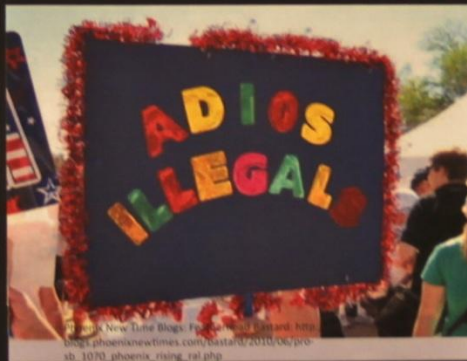


Photo: New York Blogs: Fashion and Standard. <http://blogs.nytimes.com/blogs/2010/06/prosb-1070-phoenix-rising-ral.php>

Analysis

- The statement mocks the "other" by using the "other's" native language, Spanish, in "Adios."
- The idea of racism is raised, as the actual immigration law does not define "illegal immigrants" as Latinos who speak Spanish.
- Illegal and legal immigrants are lumped together as illegals

Analysis Continued

- The sign demonstrates that the dominant culture does not take the co-culture seriously, by simply telling "them" (the "illegals"), which is used as a negative term, "goodbye, adios."
- Ironically, colors associated with Latino culture are used to make a point of sarcastically bidding farewell to this co-culture.

Ideology in the Artifact

By lumping illegal and legal immigrants together and bidding all "adios," those supporting the immigration bill demonstrate their adversity to cultural diversity.

These members of the dominant culture maintain a hegemonic or conservative ideology that suggests all "illegals" must be sent home, that is, out of the United States.


Conclusions and Implications

The protest artifacts communicate:

- Fear of the Other
- Hegemonic ideology
- Popular rhetoric about immigration often operates by representing the immigrant as a social "problem" U.S. citizens should fear
- Fear seems to manifest itself in anger and frustration, as the dominant "us" begin to fear change created by the changing face of the U.S.
- A greater understanding of the ideology these protest signs and slogans communicate may help to bring the discussion of multiculturalism to a more diplomatic and reflective level.

Bibliography

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Phoenix New Time Blogs: Featherhead Bastard:
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