

The Rhetorical Dimensions of Citizenship: Undocumented Immigrants Defining Their
Identity and Place in the “Nation of Immigrants”

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Abstract

The idea of the United States as a nation of immigrants has been a focal point of citizenship and immigration discourses in the latter half of the 20th and early 21st centuries. At the same time, unauthorized migration became a political concern in the nation-state's regime of governmentality. The regime defined the terms of admission, concurrently producing the conditions of illegality, ascribing them to those deemed unwanted and unwelcome, the ever-so-popular "illegal aliens." As the political regime continues to increase its efforts to place rhetorical and material borders around what is perceived as "American," citizenship has become an increasingly contested term. In this dissertation, I examine the rhetorical efforts of undocumented immigrants and their allies to protest the dominant discursive regime of illegality. The dissertation posits that the mythic framework of "nation of immigrants" has come to define the different ways in which citizenship and belonging are understood in the United States. Through examinations of speeches by immigrant rights activists, the three case studies of the dissertation present several ways in which undocumented immigrants and their allies approach the concept of citizenship. My examination reveals how some activists strategically appeal for marginal inclusion through documentation; other activists demand a path to citizenship as a strategy for inclusion; yet others rely on decolonializing rhetorics that seek to redefine cultural and formal citizenship in the United States. The three contrasting strategies illustrate the complexity of immigrant rights activism in the early 21st century, showcasing how undocumented immigrants unmask, challenge, reconfigure, but also sometimes reaffirm, the powers of the nation-state to determine the norms of citizenship. In its entirety, the project advances our understanding of the rhetorical dimensions of citizenship and offers insights into how the coalition building efforts of immigrants are often limited by their contrasting and competing visions of inclusion and membership in a national community.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The word “immigration” occupies a special place in the collective psyche of the U.S. nation. It simultaneously activates feelings of ancestral pride and fears of the foreigner as someone who is perceived as different and dangerous. Wielded as both a god and devil term, “immigration” has been a historically politicized term that prompts the U.S. nation and political elites to debate the merits and dangers of allowing foreigners to enter a country that was originally built by immigrants.¹ The early 21st century became an era of renewed anxiety about the impact of immigration on the U.S. economy, demographics, and national identity. Specifically, renewed fears of the so-called “illegal aliens” defined media and political discourses about immigration in the new century. These fears were grounded in a perception that the United States had lost control of its borders and that foreigners were altering the character of the nation.

By the early 21st century, the U.S. government had ramped up immigration policy enforcement through a combination of the highly-militarized U.S.-Mexico border apparatus and the deportation raids of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency in the interior. The two-pronged approach aimed to reduce the number of foreigners seeking unauthorized entry in the United States and to remove foreigners already living in the country without authorization. Accordingly, the media landscape reflected and amplified discourses about immigration, borders, and threats to the U.S. nation’s security and identity. Discourses about “illegal aliens” captured the nation’s attention and eventually enabled Donald Trump to build a successful presidential campaign based on fears of immigrants and porous borders. Collectively, these developments illustrate long-standing anxieties about the need to police and protect the

normative borders of U.S. citizenship and identity (racial, cultural, economic, and gendered), particularly against immigrants from Mexico and Central America.² They also show that the topic of immigration continues, and would likely continue, to occupy a central spot in U.S. politics and debates about citizenship and belonging.

At first glance, anxieties about immigration appear to be reactionary. Between 1990 and 2007, the number of unauthorized immigrants in the United States rose from 3.5 million to 12.2 million, with nearly half arriving from Mexico.³ A closer look, however, reveals that the increase was as much a result of people migrating to the United States as it was an indication of the U.S. nation-state's efforts to narrow the limits of inclusion through policies that produced the conditions of illegality. Over the last century, but even more so in the last two decades, the U.S. federal government and several state governments made continuous efforts to police and close the border between the United States and Mexico. In October 1994, California Governor Pete Wilson signed into law Proposition 187, which started Operation Gatekeeper, a concerted effort to expand the Border Patrol and to build a border fence between the state of California and Mexico. In addition, the law targeted Latinx immigrants in the interior, restricting public and social benefits to undocumented immigrants, including access to healthcare and education. Through its nationwide media coverage, Proposition 187 also fueled discourses that conflated and equated the Latinx body with the labels "Mexican" and "illegal."⁴

By 1996, public and media discourses about the threat of "illegal aliens" set the tone for the U.S. presidential election and its surrounding debates. Eventually, the word "illegal" was officially sanctioned by the U.S. government through its inclusion in the name of the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform & Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA).

The law was the most comprehensive reform of U.S. immigration policy since the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) and its focus on enforcement and border protection would shape immigration policy for the next several decades. Indeed, by the early 21st century, discourses of illegality and border security had become dominant mainstays in U.S media and politics. Even as the number of unauthorized border crossings from Mexico decreased and more unauthorized immigrants arrived from other countries, Hispanic identity became gradually conflated with the label “illegal immigrant.”⁵ Tensions and debates about an immigration crisis in the early 21st century followed patterns established in previous decades. In 1984, both the Democratic and Republican political parties depicted a national “crisis” caused by the arrival of “illegal” immigrants through the U.S.-Mexico border. Debates about an immigration crisis in the early 21st century rehashed old arguments, fueled old fears, and further entrenched the view of immigrants who lacked formal authorization to be in the United States as criminals and as “illegal aliens.” Both President George W. Bush and President Barack Obama emphasized the need to control the border and to enforce immigration law by targeting immigrants who committed violent crimes. In practice, their administrations deported record-high numbers of immigrants with only minor infractions, such as traffic violations, or often had no criminal record at all.⁶ This seeming paradox points to the common, but erroneous, assumption that “illegal” automatically means “criminal.” The popular conflation of the two terms often erases important nuances, factors, and circumstances that lead an immigrant to lack lawful/formal status.

From a disciplinary perspective, rhetoric scholars recognize that “immigration” is among the U.S. nation’s key ideographs.⁷ D. Robert DeChaine explains that as an

ideograph, “immigration” is “wielded as both a god and devil term, and [is] handily conscripted to serve any number of enthymematic ends,” especially as it is “implicitly and explicitly linked to conceptions of citizenship and identity.”⁸ Furthermore, immigration and rhetoric scholars have paid significant attention to the topics of borders, citizenship, and immigration as they relate to questions of race and the U.S. national identity’s presumed normative whiteness.⁹ In various ways, rhetoric scholars of U.S. immigration and citizenship speak to Kent Ono and John Sloop’s argument that borders, both material and figural, can draw people in or outside of citizenship based on their race, culture, gender, sexuality and/or language.¹⁰ Official policies and dominant discursive frames that target Latinx immigrants as always/already “illegal” and “criminal” produce the conditions of exclusion, upholding the borders of U.S. citizenship in racialized ways designed to protect regimes of normative whiteness. Conversely, such policies and discourses established exigence for the rise of immigrant rights activism in the early 21st century which protests the figural and material borders of U.S. citizenship and identity, and the discourse of “illegality” that underlies them.

In this dissertation, I present three cases of immigrant rights rhetoric in which activists rely on forms of personal disclosure and personal narratives to make claims for belonging and to protest contemporary U.S. immigration policies and practices. Undocumented immigrants offer scholars a unique perspective on the rhetorical dimensions and characteristics of citizenship. DeChaine observes that “to *be* a migrant in the United States today is to inhabit a particular subject position in the civic imaginary, a contingent subjectivity constructed to a great extent through rhetorical practices.”¹¹ Commonly perceived as “illegals,” they are cast as permanent outsiders to the United

States; at the same time, the pervasive ideology and myth of the United States as a “nation of immigrants” allows them to appeal as cultural insiders. As both outsiders and insiders, undocumented immigrants ask us to reconsider our understanding of citizenship and the nation-state. The guiding research question across the three cases in this dissertation is whether immigrant rights activists challenge the norms of citizenship and belonging in contemporary United States through their rhetorics of protest. If so, how? If not, which normative aspects do they uphold and what implications does this have on the social, cultural, and political subjectivity of immigrants in the United States? Finally, what do we learn about citizenship as both a discursive practice and a legal concept?

In each of the case studies, I illustrate the rhetorical dimensions of citizenship and belonging by analyzing how the speakers engage in questions about who is to be included, how and why, and what that inclusion looks like? The cases allow me to illustrate that even as most immigrants protest the normative discursive framework of “illegality,” they often do so in ways that uphold normative presumptions about U.S. citizenship and immigration. The problem lies in the fact that, as Karma Chávez argues, rhetorics of inclusion often don’t result in meaningful systemic change and, instead, produce the limited and incremental inclusion of certain groups of immigrants; specifically, those who effectively protest their own “illegality” and establish their “desirability.”¹² Nevertheless, I argue that despite their distinct and disparate limitations, each of the forms of immigrant rights activism I examine in this dissertation offers viable ways of protest that shift and broaden the conversation about immigration, moving it away from the reductive and often inaccurate framework of “illegality.”

Specifically, I identify three rhetorical strategies that immigrant rights activists use to contest and reimagine citizenship in the contemporary United States. U.S. citizenship is an increasingly contested space as the dominant political regime continues to increase its efforts to place rhetorical and material borders around what is perceived as “American.” The first strategy is characterized by the appeal for marginal inclusion through documentation. The second strategy is based around the appeal for inclusion and the demand for a path to citizenship premised on immigrants’ ability to embody forms of U.S. cultural citizenship to prove their belonging in U.S. communities. The third strategy is characterized by the attempt to decolonialize and reconstitute the “American” subjectivity by promoting national conversations, alliances, and coalitions that interrogate the intersections of race, immigration, and citizenship. The three strategies illustrate the complexity of immigrant rights activism in the early 21st century. In the case studies of my dissertation, I not only identify the three strategies, but I assess the ways through which immigrant rights activists unmask, challenge, reconfigure, but also sometimes reaffirm, the powers of the nation-state and the dominant understanding of citizenship. As a rhetorical critic, I adopt a postcolonial approach and the orientation of critical rhetoric to interpret, analyze, and critique their discursive efforts to disrupt regimes of power.

In this introductory chapter, I offer a brief overview of the three case studies, followed by a discussion of rhetorical criticism as my method of analysis and critical rhetoric as my orientation. I then discuss protest, the feminine rhetorical style, and citizenship as my orienting analytical tools and concepts. Finally, I situate my dissertation as a postcolonial scholarly project of an interdisciplinary nature that is nonetheless

grounded by the method of textual analysis and rhetorical criticism, and is deeply rooted in the field of communication studies.

The Speeches of Immigrants

By choosing to examine individual speeches of immigrants and immigrant rights activists, I intentionally move beyond discussing policy-oriented mainstream U.S. immigrant rights organizations that became popular in the 21st century, such as the National Immigration Law Center (NILC), Center for Community Change (CCC), Fair Immigration Reform Movement (FIRM),¹³ National Council of La Raza, Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF), and the National Immigration Forum, among others. My rationale for this decision is driven by Walter Nicholls's concern that because many of these organizations are "run mostly by university-educated, middle-class citizens . . . many in the rank and file may begin to question whether leading immigrant rights associations can actually represent the 'true' interests of undocumented immigrants."¹⁴ Aviva Chomsky shares a similar concern, noting that these organizations adopted a focus-group approach that sought to accomplish a political compromise which not only moved away from the vision of radical policy change, but also accepted the enforcement and punitive logics of anti-immigrant lobbyists in both Democratic and Republican parties.¹⁵

As I examine speeches by undocumented immigrants and their allies, I show their individual engagement with the concepts of citizenship and belonging. The decision to examine individual speeches, rather than their collective representation in the rhetorics produced by policy-oriented immigrant rights organizations reflects a postcolonial commitment to hear and listen to the voices of undocumented immigrants in an effort to

better understand their own visions of inclusion and belonging. The individual speeches personalize a highly-politicized topic, bringing to light the real-life, material experiences of their often-racialized subject positions as undocumented immigrants. The one exception is Enrique Morones, founder and director of the Border Angels activist group, who is a U.S. citizen. I include his speech in my project because through his interactions with migrants and border-crossers, Morones acts as a voice for a population of people who have been rendered voiceless. Despite his own legal status as a U.S. citizen, Morones speaks on behalf of the usually-voiceless and faceless border migrants, personalizing and humanizing their stories. In the speech, Morones addresses California's Latino Legislative caucus to protest the increases in border enforcement and militarization included in Senate Bill 744. Morones advocates the humane treatment of migrant border crossers, bringing attention to the deadly effects of the border enforcement regime. Using thanatopolitics, Morones shares stories of migrant deaths to reveal the biopolitics of migrant life and critique the power of the nation-state to determine whose lives to let perish in the desert.¹⁶

In the second case study, I examine the rhetoric of undocumented immigrant youth as represented in the speeches of three immigrant women. I examine Cristina Jiménez's keynote address at the 2012 national congress of United We Dream, in which she creates discursive space for undocumented youth to share their stories, claim their belonging, and fight for their formal inclusion in U.S. society. As such, she offers an image of cultural citizenship as a "dual process of self-making and being-made within webs of power linked to the nation-state and civil society."¹⁷ In the second half of the chapter, I examine two speeches of undocumented immigrant youth which illustrate how

webs of power that define the norms of U.S. cultural citizenship constrain the inventional resources available to those who seek inclusion. These TEDx presentations by Leezia Dhalla and Rossy Evelyn Lima show contrasting engagements with the mythic framework of the American Dream as the two women embrace and embody different iterations of cultural citizenship. Despite their different and disparate enactments of cultural citizenship, the three women do not radically disrupt the normative logics of nation-state citizenship and, instead, appeal for their inclusion in the institution.

In the third case study, I examine the rhetoric of undocumented immigrant and Pulitzer-prize winning journalist Jose Antonio Vargas. I show how Vargas attempts to redefine and decolonialize what it means to be an “American” by promoting intersectional coalitions and conversations among people in an increasingly diverse United States. My text of analysis is his keynote address at the 2016 National High School Journalism Convention in Los Angeles, CA, in which Vargas addresses an audience of young journalists, as he protests the tendency of the U.S. media and public to use the word “illegal” to describe immigrants living in the country without authorization. Challenging nativist and racist beliefs about a “core” U.S. identity, Vargas urges his listeners to engage in conversations about the role of race, immigration, and identity in defining what it means to be an “American.” Doing so, Vargas urges them to realize their coalitional potential and reimagine citizenship in ways that account for the diversity that exists materially across the United States. In what I argue to be a decolonial rhetorical effort, Vargas puts forward an alternative image of U.S. citizenship which invalidates legal/illegal distinctions, and creates new norms of citizenship based on material presence, belonging, and participation in vibrant and diverse communities.

Collectively, the three case studies illustrate how undocumented immigrants in the early 21st century complicate traditional notions of immigration, belonging, and citizenship. Responding to the burgeoning anti-immigrant nativism of the early 21st century, each of the three forms of immigrant rights activism engages in different ways the normative and dominant logics of immigration, national belonging, and citizenship. The case studies illustrate the complexity of these topics, revealing the tendency of undocumented immigrants to sometimes uphold and conform to normative aspects of the very discourses and regime they oppose.

I approach the speeches of these activists as rhetorical fragments in the broader sociopolitical context and cultural conversation about immigration, belonging, and citizenship in 21st century United States. Through vernacular discourses, activists generally resist and protest official policies and practices of the U.S. nation-state that otherwise reduce them to subjects of the state. Some of the activist speeches examined in the dissertation illustrate what J. David Cisneros calls “the possibility of vernacular discourse to challenge and remake the borders of citizenship and belonging.”¹⁸ However, others illustrate Beth Baker-Cristales’ argument that despite their use of vernacular protest rhetorics, undocumented immigrants often uphold the dominant neoliberal characteristics of the very discourse they oppose.¹⁹

It is also important to note that all the speeches examined in the three case studies occurred during Barack Obama’s presidency. As such, the rhetoric of immigrant rights activists examined here needs to be understood as a response to a sociocultural and political climate characterized by Obama’s promise and rhetoric of positive political change.²⁰ Even as immigrant rights leaders criticized Obama as the “deporter-in-chief,”

due to his administration's actions in deporting large numbers of undocumented immigrants, they nonetheless spoke and acted within a discursive landscape that invited hope for the possibility of achieving legislative success in reforming U.S. immigration policy.²¹

Approaching the speeches of undocumented immigrants as rhetorics of protest allows me to interrogate how dissent and protest function within a democratic society when performed by non-citizen subjects of the U.S. nation-state. Robert Ivie observes that dissent is discursive in nature, and is inherent to democratic processes.²² My work here adds to our understanding of dissent by discussing its application across the boundaries of democracy and the nation-state, as I interrogate if and how democratic dissent is enacted by people whose place and voice in the demos is invalidated by the norms of citizenship of the U.S. nation-state. Through the three case studies, I examine how immigrant rights activists engage dominant discursive regimes that frame immigrants as legal/illegal in an age of increasing global migration. Doing so, they expose the limits of democracy for non-citizens who reside, work, and travel in allegedly democratic societies.

Next, I discuss rhetorical criticism as my primary method of analysis. I then overview the theoretical foundation and concepts that orient my examination in the chapters of the dissertation.

Method and Analytical Approach

The primary method of my dissertation is criticism and my object of inquiry is rhetorical action. I understand and approach rhetoric as the persuasive dimension of discursive and symbolic practice.²³ Rhetoric is a form of discursive practice which seeks

to define, contest, and redefine social reality through the use of symbols and language, thus becoming our equipment for living.²⁴ But the scope of rhetorical action is not limited to written and spoken language practices such as the production of speeches, pamphlets, and debates.²⁵ James Jasinski points out that John Dewey's discussion of "public acts" significantly influenced U.S. American scholars of rhetoric who expanded the scope and limits of what counts as rhetorical action.²⁶ Indeed, in the 1980s Michael Leff observed a shift in the way scholars have approached rhetoric "from a kind of discourse to a dimension in discourse, from an emphasis on certain products to an emphasis on a certain kind of activity."²⁷ A decade later, Leff added that "it is now generally agreed that rhetoric is not a property of certain kinds of texts but a process that inheres in all discursive practices and that influences social consciousness at every level of its manifestation."²⁸ I use this definition as a vantage point to understand immigrant rights rhetoric as both discursive and symbolic action that seeks to persuade and influence the social, political, and legal consciousness of the U.S. public.

Choosing to analyze the speeches of undocumented immigrants and their allies, I follow Karlyn Kohrs Campbell's call to rhetorical critics to go beyond documenting the history of major political events, and to instead survey "the full range of symbolic strategies employed by highly diverse speakers throughout American history."²⁹ Effectively, she delineated a new direction for scholars of public address, noting that "the rhetoric of outgroups is, comparatively speaking, more important for rhetorical criticism and theory."³⁰ For Campbell, "rhetorical criticism requires rich, complex cultural and historical understanding" as a way to reveal and assess the "cultural and rhetorical diversity that underscores our common national [U.S.] values, which have been

articulated so vividly in the speeches of dissenters and protestors, such as anarchists, communists, and Black Power advocates, as well as by those we celebrate as great patriots.”³¹ In this context, undocumented immigrants occupy a uniquely complicated position as people who lack the formal status of U.S. citizenship but participate in the U.S. public sphere nonetheless. As such, their protest rhetorics invite our critical attention. Historically, protesters who had been oppressed, marginalized, and excluded from the sociopolitical order have needed to be “highly inventive, developing strategies that go far beyond arguments as traditionally understood” in order to gain visibility, and they have had to maintain long-term persuasive campaigns, as the effects of individual rhetorical efforts have been “difficult if not impossible to identify.”³²

Indeed, the political effects and significance of individual speeches by undocumented immigrants are hard to determine, especially in a political and sociocultural climate less than hospitable to immigrants. Like Campbell’s argument that the rhetoric of 19th century women activists challenged “the most fundamental values underlying American society,” I argue that 21st century undocumented immigrants face oppression that delegitimizes their personhood and invalidates their speech, thus urging them to similarly challenge the fundamental norms of citizenship in U.S. American society.³³ Even though undocumented immigrants have been unable to inspire lasting political changes, as my dissertation shows, they have been instrumental in disrupting dominant discursive and political frameworks of immigrant legality/illegality which has laid the groundwork and potential for future sociopolitical changes in U.S. attitudes toward citizenship and immigration.

Through my examination, I follow Christian Kock and Lisa Villadsen's call for "critical observation, description, and evaluation of the rhetoric" that occurs in a deliberative democratic state, such as the United States, which is not limited to "discourse by public officials or candidates," but instead requires us to attend to the vernacular rhetorics of disenfranchised populations that participate in public debates, as a way to "understand more fully the empowering and emancipatory aspects of rhetoric in society."³⁴ Ultimately, my dissertation interrogates the rhetorical processes through which citizenship is performed, contested, and redefined.

Throughout the dissertation, I engage the method of rhetorical criticism in a way that incorporates the practice of close textual reading of the speeches of undocumented immigrants and their allies through a critical perspective that illustrates their analytic, interpretive, and evaluative potential.³⁵ My critical perspective and criteria for interpretation and evaluation follow Michael McGee and Raymie McKerrow's fragmentation thesis, allowing me to approach the speeches of immigrants as textual fragments produced in the context of and reflective of broader sociopolitical discourses about citizenship and immigration in the United States. Furthermore, I take note of J. David Cisneros argument that citizenship is not just the situation that gives rise to rhetoric, but that rhetoric itself creates and defines the conditions of citizenship.³⁶ Using this approach, I analyze the rhetorical dimensions of citizenship as it becomes interpellated with the logics of immigration, borders, and belonging in the speeches of immigrant rights activists. The final product of criticism enriches our understanding of people's efforts to be included as they challenge dominant discourses of "illegality," to establish a sense of belonging, and to define their social, cultural, and national identities.

Even as I analyze individual speeches by immigrant rights advocates, I approach them through the perspective of critical rhetoric as textual fragments in a broader discourse about immigration and citizenship in early 21st century United States.³⁷ By intersecting the method of close textual analysis of individual speeches with Michael McGee's fragmentation thesis, I address Celeste Condit's reservation that close reading can sometimes lead to an overly formalist approach, making the rhetorical text an object of its own reflection, which can lead to the critic losing sight of the text's situated-ness and "its role in the perpetuation [or contestation] of the dominant social order."³⁸ Condit's caution is well-founded as, for decades, the field of rhetorical studies had been characterized by the tendency to adopt a formalist approach to the close reading of texts, what became known as the neo-Aristotelian tradition.³⁹ This approach placed too much emphasis on a text's relationship to a strictly defined and constrained rhetorical situation, and often based its conclusions on observable rhetorical effects on specific audiences.⁴⁰ Edwin Black explains that "there is little disposition among neo-Aristotelian critics to comprehend the discourse in a larger context, to see it, as for example the movement study would, as part of a historical process of argument."⁴¹ Raymie McKerrow responded to this limitation of rhetorical studies with his 1989 seminal essay "Critical Rhetoric: Theory and Praxis," in which he delineates a move away from the close reading of discrete texts, and promotes the analysis of texts as fragments of larger discursive formations. McGee similarly argues in favor of this critical rhetoric, noting that "texts are to be understood to be larger than the apparently finished discourse that presents itself as transparent," and that the discourse is instead a reconstruction made of fragments of other

discourses.⁴² Placed in conversation, McGee and McKerrow can be credited with what became known as the fragmentation thesis:

Texts do not reveal their persuasive force in discrete rhetorical situations where a specific audience encounters a specific text; rather, message fragments exert persuasive force, and participate in social and political power relations, as they circulate throughout a culture, migrating from one situation to another, combining and colliding with a host of other fragments.⁴³

As discursive fragments that function rhetorically, the speeches of undocumented immigrants and their allies resist ideological assumptions and norms of citizenship, challenging hegemonic political and cultural forces. The rhetorical effects of such fragments are not always immediately manifest or achieved independently; instead, they function together as fragments in a broader discursive and political landscape as they seek to shift the borders of inclusion and in some cases, redefine the norms of citizenship. Notably, this reconceptualization of rhetorical texts as fragments operating in broad contexts does not invalidate or preclude close reading as an integral step of the analytical process. Rather, it allows the critic to offer a richer understanding of how texts operate rhetorically within a political culture.

For this dissertation, the orientation toward rhetorical texts as fragments requires me to examine how the speeches of undocumented immigrants reflect and respond to ascribed norms of citizenship embedded in the mythic frameworks of the “American Dream” and the United States as a “nation of immigrants.” Additionally, it requires a different set of evaluative criteria, which do not seek to assess immediate rhetorical effects in a given situation for a specific audience and, instead, seek to show how rhetorical texts disrupt or uphold normative ideas about citizenship and immigration

embedded in the above-mentioned myths. This approach is exemplified in the orientation of critical rhetoric.

Stressing that it is not a strictly defined method, McKerrow explains that critical rhetoric is an orientation toward the demystification of power within discursive and political regimes.⁴⁴ As an orientation, it requires us to examine the relationship between rhetorical texts, ideology, and power.⁴⁵ Rhetorical texts reflect particular ideological positions at the same time that they resist others and as such, they are products of complex socio-political and cultural power relations. In this dissertation, the speeches of immigrant rights advocates resist powerful discursive and political regimes that position immigrants (specifically, undocumented immigrants) as people to be feared, policed, and eventually excluded. In these regimes, the image of the “illegal” immigrant is in diametric opposition to the construct of “the American people.” McKerrow identifies a “dominant sense of ‘the people’ as one of the key ways in which discourse effects domination and oppression.”⁴⁶ In the context of this dissertation, the dominant discursive framework of immigrant legality/illegality oppresses, marginalizes, and excludes people who fall outside the scope of legal U.S. citizenship. As outsiders of “the people,” or as members of a counter-public, undocumented immigrants and their allies use vernacular rhetorics in their efforts to disrupt the dominant public sphere, as they seek access to it either by proving their worthiness of inclusion or by challenging and redefining its norms for inclusion.⁴⁷ As a rhetorical critic, I am interested in documenting and analyzing if and how these vernacular voices disrupt the discourse of illegality, which necessitates a short discussion of intent and my role as a critic.

Crucially, McKerrow explains that scholars who adopt the orientation of critical rhetoric move away from their traditional role as unbiased interpreters of discrete texts, and instead adopt a political role as inventors of rhetorical texts themselves.⁴⁸ This orientation is also in line with Karlyn Kohrs Campbell's earlier call for rhetorical critics to attend to their own biases and political positions.⁴⁹ It is equally important to note that "the focus of critical rhetoric is on the symbolism – various fragmented messages – and not on the intentions of the agents that produced these symbols."⁵⁰ That is to say that "the critic's attention is not directed at how an advocate's intentions are realized in various textual strategies; rather, the critic brackets intentions and focuses on the way in which symbolic structures such as narrative and argument function to perpetuate or challenge relations of power."⁵¹ My goal as a critical rhetorician is to examine how the speeches of undocumented immigrants and their allies simultaneously challenge and uphold aspects of the dominant powers and logics of nation-state citizenship.

The speeches examined in this dissertation can be understood broadly as forms of protest rhetoric. Within rhetorical studies, protest has often been tied to the study of social movements for its integral role in the way groups of people organize socially and politically to (re)articulate meaning.⁵² As our knowledge of movements and protest progressed, scholars observed that social movement and protest rhetoric can't be adequately evaluated using traditional norms of decorum, elocution, rational and reasoned discourse, or adherence to genre and form, because they often seek to challenge the discursive norms and logics that uphold hegemonic systems of power.⁵³ Indeed, protest can take on different rhetorical forms and can operate on different levels. For example, we can study the function of protest in the campaigns and efforts of tightly

organized movements with strictly defined leadership. But we can also study protest in the individual rhetorical performances of immigrant rights activists as members of broad and loosely defined coalitions that share similar goals, but differ in organization and execution. This insight is particularly important to this dissertation because as Tania Unzueta-Carrasco argues, “since 2010 undocumented youth activists have increasingly led our own movement, developed our own tactics and messages, and fought for people and rights that may not be considered strategic and that often are not supported by mainstream immigration advocates.”⁵⁴ As members of different activist organizations, the speakers examined here show the permeable boundaries of membership and the intersectional nature of the broadly defined immigrant rights social movement.⁵⁵ Furthermore, their rhetorical performances signal a resistance to traditional models of organizational leadership and structure.⁵⁶ Their individual rhetorical performances invite us to see a coalitional potential of intersecting interests and agendas as key characteristics of their self-organizing methods and advocacy.⁵⁷

Despite its seemingly ambiguous composition, the movement of immigrant rights activists in early 21st century United States is a cultural and political phenomenon that urges us to examine the way people use rhetoric to confront and supplant the existing order.⁵⁸ J. David Cisneros observes that the political struggle for inclusion and recognition of Latinas/os is not a modern phenomenon and, instead, has a long history dating back to at least the middle of the 19th century.⁵⁹ However, the contemporary form of immigrant rights activism crosses beyond Latinx activism and represents the mosaic of racial, cultural, economic, gendered identities affected by the condition of being undocumented. The three case studies in this dissertation show how undocumented

immigrants confront and protest aspects of a discursive and political regime that sees immigrants through a binary lens of legal/illegal. Crucially, I show how the different speakers adopt rhetorical strategies that don't always seek to supplant or radically alter the regime and instead only seek to modify it in ways that facilitate their inclusion and enfranchisement. Robert Cathcart notes this important distinction in his discussion of the contrasts between reform and radical movements.⁶⁰ He argues that members of reform movements use a strategy of identification with the external system they oppose. Even as they identify their division from the external system, they recognize and accept "a common substance," regarding values, meanings, and norms of communication. As such, reform movements seek adjustment of the existing order, without completely rejecting it. On the other hand, radical movements confront the existing order and seek a complete re-ordering and re-establishment of values, norms and communication standards. The three cases in my dissertation showcase how activists like Enrique Morones and Leezia Dhalla utilize rhetorical strategies characteristic of the reform category, whereas Jose Antonio Vargas and Rossy Evelyn Lima reject the established system in their efforts to radically alter the discursive and political regimes of U.S. citizenship and immigration. My analysis reveals that immigrant rights activists utilize elements of both forms of protest in their attempts to resist the discourse of illegality. Combining elements of both forms of protests, undocumented immigrants sometimes reaffirm dominant logics of citizenship and immigration, but other times end up challenging the norms in ways that rhetorically shift understandings of citizenship and national belonging.

Another important aspect that unites the immigrant rights activists in the three case studies is their incorporation of elements of the feminine rhetorical style. Karlyn

Kohrs Campbell defines the feminine style as a “strategic adaptation to socialization and oppression,” and a style “equally appropriate for male and females, whether oppressed or not.”⁶¹ Feminine style is “a way of speaking that enacts nurturing, promotes empowerment, and facilitates experiential reasoning.”⁶² In their rhetorics of protest, immigrant rights activists seek “to alter society and to undermine premises in the dominant ideology,” which requires them to depart from the expectations of their audiences, “to create dissonance among deeply held values, to jolt listeners out of complacency.”⁶³ Although feminine style cannot be used as a deductive framework to explain the discourses of activists, as a strategic approach it calls attention to a set of generic characteristics.⁶⁴

First, the feminine rhetorical style is inductive, relying on associative, dramatic, and narrative modes of development grounded in examples from personal experience.⁶⁵ Second, an interrelated characteristic of feminine style is “the use of a personal tone”⁶⁶ Third, the style is characterized by appeals to group identity and cohesion. Jane Blankenship and Deborah Robson note that basing political judgments on lived experiences, valuing inclusivity and the relational nature of being are characteristics of the political discourse of women.⁶⁷ These characteristics presuppose a personal attitude toward the subject and a plea toward audience identification as a primary goal of feminine style rhetorics.⁶⁸ Fourth, the combination of narrative modes of development, associative and personal tones, and the use of concrete examples is a strategy of identification that seeks to empower audiences. This kind of empowerment validates the personal experiences of immigrants, leads “to the realization that ‘the personal is political,’” produces “group cohesion,” which creates discursive space in which audience

members can be transformed into “agents of change.”⁶⁹ Fifth, when using feminine style, the speaker “tends to plead, to appeal to the sentiments of the audience, to ‘court’ the audience,” and to adopt the persona of a layperson, “rather than that of expert leader, preacher, or judge.”⁷⁰ Overall, the five elements of feminine style focus on consciousness-raising, and are suitable and engaging for both female and male rhetors and audiences.⁷¹

The three case studies in this dissertation illustrate how immigrant rights activists utilize elements, or combination of elements, of the feminine rhetorical style in their efforts to protest the oppression, marginalization, and exclusion of undocumented immigrants in the United States. Specifically, my analyses illustrate how elements of the feminine style allow some activists to plead for their inclusion into the U.S. public sphere and the institution of U.S. citizenship, while other activists use elements of the style in their efforts to radically disrupt established norms and logics of personhood, immigration, and citizenship. Thus, my examination extends our understanding of how protest and coalitions evolve together in the political and cultural milieu of 21st century United States, and specifically, in the context of nationwide debates about immigration, national identity, and citizenship. Approaching the speeches of undocumented immigrants and their allies as rhetorical fragments of protest, I seek to understand and illustrate the different ways in which those who are deemed “illegal” can tackle dominant discursive frameworks of legality/illegality and whether they can rhetorically alter the borders of belonging and citizenship in the United States. In the next section, I discuss citizenship as the main concept which orients my analysis in the three case studies

The Rhetorical Character of Citizenship

In their edited volume *Rhetorical Citizenship and Public Deliberation*, Christian Kock and Lisa Villadsen promote an understanding of citizenship as a discursive phenomenon in which discourse is not prefatory to action, but is instead constitutive of civic engagement and citizenship. They observe that citizenship “has long been a keyword among educators, philosophers, and political theorists,” with discussions of citizenship falling into two broad traditions.⁷² In the “liberal” tradition of social thought, citizenship is generally understood as the possession of citizens, granting them sets of freedoms and rights. On the other hand, the “republican” tradition advocated by Kock and Villadsen, understands citizenship as directly related to civic engagement and the practices of deliberation and debate. Identifying this as “rhetorical citizenship,” Kock and Villadsen note that it traces its roots to the Greek city-states and republican Rome, where rhetorical practices were “at the core of being a citizen.”⁷³ Aristotle was among the first to connect the practice of deliberation to citizenship, noting that rhetoric’s function is “to deal with things about which we deliberate, but for which we have no systematic rules.”⁷⁴ Furthermore, to be a good citizen required one to use rhetoric to deliberate on “things that are up to us and subject to action.”⁷⁵

There is, however, an important caveat to this historic distinction between the “liberal” and “republican” notions of citizenship. The “republican” conception of rhetorical citizenship with deliberation at its core subsumes the “liberal” conception of citizenship in which citizens are granted rights and freedoms as constituents, or subjects of the state. Even as the “republican” tradition emphasizes the rhetorical practices of citizenship, it has historically taken for granted and accepted as necessary the distinction between citizen and non-citizen that is at the core of the “liberal” notion of citizenship as

formal membership. Indeed, *xenoi*, as non-citizens, were not allowed to speak in the Greek city-states. Put differently, the “republican” notion of rhetorical citizenship does not directly oppose the assumption embedded in the “liberal” model that one has to be a formal citizen of the state in order to enjoy the rights of citizenship. Over time, the two traditions have helped establish a dominant model of governance in which citizenship is bounded to the city-state or the nation-state.⁷⁶ Michel Foucault explains that citizenship, as both a discursive and a legal construct, naturalizes power relations as it positions people as subjects of the state.⁷⁷ As subjects of the state, citizens and non-citizens are treated differentially based on institutional, legal, and cultural norms, enabling the state to subordinate the materiality of their human bodies and treat people as subjects first and foremost.⁷⁸

This differential treatment of the non-citizen subject was made clear at least as far back as ancient Greece, where the word *xenoi* designated freeborn foreigners as people who reside and participate in the community of the city-state for a period of time, but they are never entitled to the full political rights of natural born citizens of the city-state. Citizenship was a form of privilege, later expanded by the Romans who created strata of citizenship in which natural-born persons of the Roman Empire received the full rights of citizenship, but allies of the empire enjoyed limited rights and citizenship as well. In both Greece and Rome, we see how the “republican” notion of rhetorical citizenship as civic engagement and democratic deliberation extended some of the rights and freedoms of citizens to non-citizens, but always within limits that never threatened the citizen-foreigner distinction. Crucially, the distinction between citizens and foreigners has been a defining principle of nation-building, and belonging to a nation-state has been a driving

factor for the realization of human rights in the last century.⁷⁹ In other words, the logics of nation-state citizenship subordinate and limit human rights based on one's national belonging. This principle manifested itself during the increasing globalization and transnational migrations of the late 20th and early 21st century which sharpened national sensitivities and prompted nation-state citizens to embrace the "state's exceptional powers to extract" undocumented or "illegal" populations from their territories.⁸⁰

The creation of the modern passport system facilitated the processes of inclusion and exclusion from the nation-state, signaling "the dawn of a new era in human affairs, in which individual states and the international state system as a whole successfully monopolized the legitimate authority to permit movement within and across their jurisdictions."⁸¹ John Torpey explains that this monopolization of control over the movement of people involved the mutually reinforcing aspects of the widespread formation of nation-states around the globe, "the codification of laws establishing which types of persons may move within or cross" a nation's borders, the development of "documentation techniques to identify and track each and every person on the face of the globe," and the "construction of bureaucracies designed to implement this regime of identification and to scrutinize persons and documents in order to verify identities."⁸² This regime of documentation did not end the actual migration of people, but instead created the conditions for undocumented, or "illegal," migration. Issuing documents, such as passports as visas, nation-states narrowly define the terms of legitimate movement, allowing them to also define "who belongs and who does not, who may come and go and who not, and to make these distinctions intelligible and enforceable."⁸³

In the context of the present project, the logics of nation-state citizenship and its accompanying logic of documentation are central to contemporary politics and debates about immigration, citizenship, and personhood in the United States. Historically, the United States has maintained two criteria for U.S. citizenship based on being born on U.S. soil (*jus soli*) or being born to parents who are U.S. citizens (*jus sanguinis*). Everyone who falls outside of these two categories is officially categorized as a “foreign-born alien.” Foreign-born aliens in the U.S. are extended certain rights and privileges based on their ability to obtain documents that simultaneously identify them, define the terms of their presence and the duration of their stay. These conditions and limits of inclusion, as well as the extension of rights to foreign-born aliens in the United States, have historically been fluid, and even transient. Often, as the legal standards of inclusion narrowed, foreign-born individuals fought to obtain legal documents, asserting their right to be included in the U.S. polity and to be treated equally as human beings.⁸⁴

Furthermore, the presence of foreign-born individuals in the United States prompts an uncomfortable conflict between the foundational ideals of the United States as both a “nation of immigrants” and a “nation of laws.” The tortured history of xenophobic immigration policies has shown repeatedly that the two ideals have been incompatible when placed in practice. Indeed, policies of exclusion based on racist and xenophobic principles define the course of U.S. immigration policy. What they all have in common as a guiding rationale is the distinction between citizen and alien. In Chapter 2 of this dissertation, I discuss how the relationship between the two mythic conceptions of the United States as a “nation of immigrants” and a “nation of laws” has evolved over time. I examine how different iterations of the myths have been characterized by

interplaying attitudes of xenophilia and xenophobia.⁸⁵ So doing, I examine how the discursive framework of immigrant legality/illegality was produced and reproduced in the second half of the 20th century through policies and practices that targeted primarily non-white immigrants. The chapter provides the historical context for my project as it explains the rationale and logics of undocumentedness and illegality, and how particular populations became targets for social, political, and physical exclusion in early 21st century United States. I document how the label “illegal alien” rose in political prominence during the second half of the 20th century as the number of immigrants from Mexico and Central America increased. In my discussion, I outline how, for the first time in history, the “illegal” marker was used to identify immigrants from Mexico and Central America. Prior groups of Irish, German, Italian immigrants were marked as undesirable and unwanted, and Chinese and Japanese immigrants were barred from entry altogether, but Latinx immigrants were the first group to be predominantly labeled as “illegal.”⁸⁶

My discussion shows how immigrant bodies became the surface on which the power of the nation-state manifested itself in the discursive production of illegality by conflating and erasing distinctions between illegal subjects of the state and illegal human beings.⁸⁷ As Stuart Hall explains, naming is a central symbolic act through which the nominalistic nature of rhetoric turns people into subjects.⁸⁸ The politics of citizenship are rhetorical constructions, and the specific act of naming subjects as “illegal” serves particular interests and political regimes. Robert Asen clarifies the political and nominalistic nature of “citizen” as a term that “includes and excludes, and it may be invoked to silence non-citizens or to coerce citizens.”⁸⁹ Similarly, labeling someone “illegal” produces social, political, and often physical exclusion.

Similar to Kock and Villadsen's conceptualization of "rhetorical citizenship," in 2004 Robert Asen put forward an argument for the reconceptualization of citizenship as a discursive practice, in which citizenship is not merely regarded as the possession of citizens, and should instead be viewed as a mode of public engagement. He clarifies that "a discourse theory shifts our understanding of citizenship from a status attribute [set of rights and privileges, conditions of membership, or allegiance to a cultural tradition] to a way of acting."⁹⁰ This reconceptualization allows us to examine how "people enact citizenship through their own agency" and invites us to see that "citizenship may be enacted by non-citizens."⁹¹ Understanding citizenship as a mode of public engagement enables us to recognize the "fluid, multimodal, and quotidian enactments of citizenship in a multiple public sphere."⁹²

In the context of my dissertation, Asen's reconfiguration of citizenship as a mode of public engagement allows me to approach the speeches of immigrant rights advocates as performances of what Asen calls "hybrid" citizenship. Attention to hybrid citizenship "means recognizing that acts do not possess an intrinsic quality," and that they attain their meaning and significance by placing them in context and examining the way they are enacted.⁹³ This does not mean that by performing citizenship one can claim the status of a citizen, but it allows us to see the discourse of undocumented immigrants as a way of acting in society, regardless of their legal status. Indeed, Asen reminds us that within a discourse theory of citizenship we move away from the question of what counts as citizenship, and instead interrogate how undocumented immigrants enact a form of "hybrid" citizenship and understand how they envision and claim their place in the U.S. American public sphere.

This move recognizes a distinction between formal and informal citizenship, allowing us to attend to the cultural dimensions of citizenship as a set of practices and processes. Kent Ono explains the distinction, noting that “formal citizenship refers to the rights that follow from being a legal citizen,” whereas “informal citizenship refers to rights and privileges resulting from the conditions of freedom felt by some but not by others that are not explicitly indicated in U.S. law to be accorded simply by having legal citizenship.”⁹⁴ Indeed, informal citizenship can be enjoyed by non-citizens who successfully assimilate into dominant cultural norms of belonging. Contemporary norms of citizenship and belonging in the United States are often grounded in allegedly colorblind logics of class and culture that strategically (re)center whiteness as a normative condition.⁹⁵ As such, informal markers of citizenship become “linguistic and embodied mechanisms that mark out particular folks based on their ethnicity, race, gender, and sexual orientation,” even as they honorifically include some non-citizens as cultural insiders.⁹⁶ The distinction between formal and informal citizenship is important as it allows some groups of foreigners who lack formal U.S. citizenship to plead for their inclusion on the basis of their claims to meet the informal markers of cultural citizenship. However, rhetorical practices that stress these aspects of cultural belonging often do not subvert the power of the nation-state or the logics of citizenship.⁹⁷ Instead, these practices plead with the dominant system to be included (incrementally, partially, or fully) in ways that often utilize elements of the feminine rhetorical style. Perhaps inadvertently, immigrant rights activists who use this approach face a conundrum similar to that of feminists who “face a choice between citizenship as a condition to which women should

have access, and subverting or deconstructing the ideal itself as a device constructed in order to exclude them.”⁹⁸

Nevertheless, the ability of immigrants to appeal to at least some markers of informal U.S. citizenship allows us to see them as cultural citizens, ones who are displaced, subordinated, illegitimated, but are nonetheless subjects who participate in the cultural landscape of U.S. citizenship politics.⁹⁹ Speaking from their precarious position, undocumented immigrants become rhetorical citizens who make claims to inclusion and belonging often using elements of the feminine rhetorical style to discursively enact a mode of cultural citizenship in the United States. Thus, a conception of citizenship as discursively performed within a culture emerges in contrast to the normative view of citizenship as an ascribed set of rights and responsibilities. As an example, William Flores and Rina Benmayor identify the concept of Latino cultural citizenship, demonstrating the ways in which people “claim membership in this society as they struggle to build communities, claim social rights and become recognized agents in society.”¹⁰⁰ Similarly, Lisa Flores argues that Chicana women in particular use a rhetoric of difference to carve out a discursive space in which to enact their political voice and to claim their belonging in a community.¹⁰¹ Renato Rosaldo also adds that cultural citizenship is “the right to be different (in terms of race, ethnicity, or native language) with respect to the norms of the dominant national community, without compromising one’s right to belong.”¹⁰² Finally, Kathryn Abrams confirms the validity of this perspective toward citizenship as a form of enactment, observing that “undocumented politics has always had a strong performative dimension,” adding that “undocumented activists show that they are deserving of citizenship not simply by petitioning for it but by

publicly taking on its responsibilities.”¹⁰³The three case studies in this dissertation illustrate how immigrant rights activists seek to reconfigure and reimagine U.S. citizenship through their rhetorics of protest, as they complicate the idea of cultural citizenship through their different and disparate rhetorics of belonging.

Overview of the Project and its Implications

My dissertation adds to an expanding body of scholarship in communication studies on the topic of immigration. Situated within the social justice turn in communication studies, my dissertation examines the communicative strategies and practices of immigrant rights activists to fight for their just inclusion in the U.S. sociopolitical order.¹⁰⁴ I attend to Antonio Tomas De La Garza, Kent Ono, and D. Robert DeChaine’s recommendation that the scholar’s responsibility is “ethico-political, because studying immigration and border rhetorics involves, or should involve, an orientation toward a horizon of social justice, a motivation that presses beyond mere explanation to a critical engagement with discourses of power.”¹⁰⁵ This requires us to examine, question, and problematize the material effects of rhetorical practices of othering. In my dissertation, I provide a critical examination of immigrant rights activist discourses for the ways in which they rhetorically engage webs of power, either by challenging or reinforcing dominant norms of citizenship and belonging.

Each dissertation chapter engages with intersecting scholarly bodies of work. In Chapter 3, I discuss Enrique Morones’s efforts to humanize immigration policy and discourse, as he uses thanatopolitics through narratives of migrant deaths to critique the biopolitics of migrant life at the U.S.-Mexico border. As such, I intersect Michel Foucault’s and Judith Butler’s work on the concept of biopower with the works of D.

Robert DeChaine, Kent Ono, Karma Chávez, and J. David Cisneros on the rhetorical dimension of borders, and the U.S.-Mexico border specifically. Next, in Chapter 4, I discuss the contrasting rhetorical strategies of identification and disidentification of DREAMers who seek legal inclusion and documentation in the U.S. regime of citizenship and immigration. My contribution adds to the existing scholarship on DREAMer rhetoric and activism from Walter Nicholls, Claudia Anguiano, Karma Chávez, and Megan Morrissey, among others. Finally, in Chapter 5, I analyze the rhetoric of Jose Antonio Vargas who advocates for intersectional coalition-building as a way to decolonialize and redefine the “American” subjectivity. In my analysis, I build on Raka Shome’s and Stuart Hall’s work on postcolonialism, entering it into conversation with Kimberlé Crenshaw’s concept of intersectionality, and with the works of Karma Chávez and Aimee Carillo Rowe on coalition-building and political subjectivities.¹⁰⁶

In its entirety, my dissertation crosses the disciplinary boundaries of communication studies, building bridges to the fields of cultural studies and immigration history. The interdisciplinary nature of my research reflects the complexity of immigration as a cultural and political phenomenon that has ideological and material effects on the lives and identities of people. The three case studies offer valuable insight into the ways immigrant rights activists reimagine citizenship and the myths of an immigrant United States. I situate my dissertation broadly into the field of rhetorical studies, as a project that examines immigration rhetorics in the cultural and sociopolitical milieu of a postcolonial United States. A postcolonial scholarly orientation represents a commitment to attend to the problematics of colonization and decolonization.”¹⁰⁷ In my examinations, I attend to principles outlined in Raka Shome’s seminal essay

“Postcolonial Interventions in the Rhetorical Canon: An ‘Other’ View.” Shome articulates “three broad perspectives of postcolonialism and the theoretical and critical issues they raise for the critical scholar: discursive imperialism, hybrid and diasporic cultural identities, and postcolonial academic self-reflexivity.”¹⁰⁸

First, she cautions against the practice of discursive imperialism which subjugates non-Western and non-white bodies by colonizing them discursively as “others” who are mere “objects of study” and “interest” in “first world” discourses.¹⁰⁹ Intervention into political, social, and scholarly practices of discursive imperialism requires us to attend to two central questions: (1) “how do Western discursive practices, in their representations of the world and of themselves, legitimize the contemporary global power structures?”; (2) “to what extent do the cultural texts of nations such as the United States and England reinforce the neo-imperial political practices of these nations?”¹¹⁰ In the specific context of immigration and this dissertation, these questions urge me to examine if and how the discursive practices of immigrant rights activists challenge the tendency of the power structure of citizenship to (re)produce the racial and cultural alienation of non-white, non-U.S. peoples. Furthermore, I examine how the rhetorics of immigrant rights activists respond to cultural texts that construct the myth of the United States as a nation of immigrants whose different iterations reinforce contemporary neo-imperial discourses of immigration and nation building.

Equally important to this dissertation is Shome’s second intervention, which calls on us to reorient toward cultural hybridity, noting that the postcolonial project is about “borderlands and hybridity” and the “cultural indeterminacy and spaces in between.”¹¹¹ This is not reduced to simply rejecting Western discursive imperialism, but necessitates

vigilance against the kind of “internal orientalism” that monolithic articulations of identity based on indigenous traditions might produce in their rearticulations of “us” versus “them” binaries.¹¹² Shome’s point is to recognize that “today, with increasing globalization of the world, it is not possible to conceive of cultures and nations monolithically.”¹¹³ In the context of the present project, Shome’s intervention directs me to resist dominant conceptions of U.S. “nation,” “people,” and “immigrants,” and to instead recognize the cultural hybridity and diversity embedded in the concepts. Despite powerful discursive attempts to present a monolithic image of the United States as a historically-white nation of immigrants, the very phrase “nation of immigrants” urges us to parse out the elements of the cultural bricolage that the movement of migrants from across the globe has created over time. The neatness of the phrase “nation of immigrants” oversimplifies the cultural history of the United States that has sometimes resulted in the “internal orientalism” that Breckenridge and Van der Veer cautions against.

A reorientation toward cultural hybridity allows one to reimagine the subject of the immigrant not as the Other, or the outsider of a nation and its culture; instead, it allows us to see the immigrant as a postcolonial individual who is “cultureless” and yet cultured through their existence in cultural and political borderlands – “living between two cultures or between two nations, and yet not being of either one,”¹¹⁴ or what Gloria Anzaldúa calls a “mestiza” consciousness.¹¹⁵ Through a postcolonial perspective, this radical rethinking of immigrants’ cultural and political identities allows us to move beyond the assumed Otherness of the foreigner, and instead to recognize points of cultural and political intersections, ultimately allowing us to deconstruct “grand cultural master narratives.”¹¹⁶

Shome's third requirement for postcolonial scholarship urges scholars to be self-reflexive in their approach to scholarship "by seeing how they themselves might be inscribed in the power relations that they are attempting to resist."¹¹⁷ Doing so, she promotes Spivak's notion of strategic essentialism and her instruction that: "In deconstructive critical practice, you have to be aware that you are going to essentialize anyway. So then strategically you can look at essentialisms, not as descriptions of the way things are, but as something one must adopt to produce a critique of anything."¹¹⁸ Even as we can't escape essentialism entirely, we must be aware of the essentialisms we create "in order to realize certain political goals."¹¹⁹ Because the three case studies in this dissertation place the spotlight on individual speeches by immigrant rights advocates, I recognize that my analysis necessitates a degree of strategic essentialism. Although these speeches can never represent the diversity and breadth of immigrant stories, experiences, and circumstances, they nonetheless illustrate aspects of how immigrants experience the powers of the U.S. nation-state. However, I remain mindful in my conclusions as I do not seek to make homogenizing and essentializing claims about immigrant rhetorics and experiences in the United States; instead, I seek to highlight the ways in which individual voices of the marginalized and oppressed engage a system of domination upheld by political and cultural norms of citizenship.

As such, I heed Darrell Allan Wanzer's critique that (1) "cultural homogeneity is a rhetorical fiction and technology of power, not an objective state threatened by fragmentation;" and (2) "fragmentation is not new; rather, it is the longstanding condition under which most outside of the First World have struggled to survive since the emergence of the modern world system in the sixteenth century."¹²⁰ Like similar calls by

Raka Shome and Lisa Flores, Wanzer calls us to attend to the rhetorics of difference produced by native, indigenous, and marginalized peoples as they interact with and respond to the colonial discursivity of state structures. Wanzer's contribution lies in his rearticulation of the assumed first-world cultural and sociopolitical homogeneity as always-already fragmented, noting that "fragmentation may very well be new, but only for a first-world subject who occupies a privileged position within the modern/colonial world system."¹²¹

Chapter 2 of the dissertation illustrates the historic processes and policies that established a homogenized vision of a U.S. nation around iterations of the "nation of immigrants" myth.¹²² The history of U.S. immigration law overviewed in the chapter traces the discursive production of the regime of immigrant legality/illegality and the disproportionate but consistent targeting of groups of immigrants as "illegals," and as populations to be policed, controlled, and excluded. The three case studies that follow attend to the different ways immigrant rights activists in the early 21st century (re)conceptualize citizenship, immigration, and belonging in United States politics. Enrique Morones's testimonial rhetoric asserts the rights of migrants to live and work in the United States without making formal claims to citizenship. The speeches of the undocumented youth, the DREAMers, reveal contrasting perceptions of belonging based on differential experiences with U.S. culture and its norms. Finally, the rhetoric of Jose Antonio Vargas unmask the futility of appeals to assimilation to create political change, as he seeks to re-define the meaning of citizenship and "American" through intersectional conversations about race, identity, and immigration.

Although this dissertation project only examines three individual cases, they have implications beyond the context of U.S. immigration policy discourses. The distinct and innovative rhetorical strategies of undocumented immigrants and their allies in the United States can become models for rhetorical action that contests the dominant framework of “illegal” immigration and redefines the norms and logics of citizenship globally across different nation-states. In a global environment of ever-increasing migration of peoples and nativist fears of the erosion of traditional nation-states, the fight for access to citizenship is gradually being pushed away from the logics of sovereignty and into the arena of human rights, as individuals and groups across the globe protest their oppression and treatment as “illegal” or “alien” subjects of political regimes of power. The United States is only one of many countries faced with difficult questions about the legitimacy of borders, and the norms on which citizenship and national belonging are predicated. The examples examined in this dissertation reveal attempts to radically rewrite the rules of citizenship, as well as efforts of inclusion that, perhaps inadvertently, legitimize the very rules of oppression embedded in the citizen-alien divide.

Chapter 2: U.S. Immigration History, the Myth of an Immigrant Nation, and the
Rhetorical Production of Illegality

*Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"*

- Emma Lazarus, 1883¹

Over time, the immortalized words of Emma Lazarus on the Statue of Liberty have become central to the grand narrative of the United States as a nation of immigrants. Indeed, President John F. Kennedy cited the poem in his influential book *A Nation of Immigrants*.² The phrase “nation of immigrants” has an enormously powerful rhetorical sway as a tool that defines the United States as a diverse and a welcoming nation, whose golden doors are (allegedly) open to everyone, but especially to those in need. Paul Spickard argues that “the rhetorical vision of the United States as a nation of immigrants has a marvelous quality of national self-celebration about it,” because it “proclaims loudly that we are a people made up of all the world’s people.”³ But the events and facts in the history of U.S. immigration reveal that the celebration and the welcome were never unqualified. Despite the democratic foundations of the United States, historically, groups of immigrants were treated differentially; some received preferential treatment, while others faced rejection and exclusion. Especially in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, immigrants tend to encounter the Statue of Liberty “not as a gateway but as a gatekeeper.”⁴

Indeed, the relationship between citizens and immigration has been a torrid affair throughout U.S. culture and politics. Leroy Dorsey and Rachel Harlow observe that “[U.S.] American citizens have long recognized the origins of [U.S.] American culture as a troubling paradox” in which the country traces its roots to the colonization of the North American continent by predominantly white north-European settlers/immigrants, but simultaneously exhibits a “recurring apprehension – if not outright fear – of immigrants.”⁵ Bonnie Honig describes this historical paradox as the interplay between xenophilia and xenophobia, as the love for and the fear of the foreigner, or the outsider. Dating as far back as Ancient Greece, foreigners (or *xenoi*) were welcomed to contribute to their hosting *polis* or state, but the extent of their welcome was accompanied by a sense of reluctance to and fear of their otherness. Honig argues that throughout history, U.S. political culture has been marked by a play of xenophobia and xenophilia that is not merely the result of periodic power shifts in government, but instead is embedded in the founding myth of an immigrant nation.

Myths, as Dorsey and Harlow explain, “represent an integral part of a community’s existence.”⁶ Furthermore, myths “articulate our experience of ourselves in our social and natural environment,” and as such they help create a sense of belonging in a community or a nation.⁷ In their analysis of Theodore Roosevelt’s *The Winning of the West*, Dorsey and Harlow argue that Roosevelt deployed a “mythic narrative that grounded both the origins of [U.S.] American society and the future strength of its people in immigration,” in which assimilation into U.S. American culture became the centerpiece that shaped, and continues to shape, public collective consciousness of immigration and U.S. citizenship to this day.⁸ But Roosevelt also cautioned against

“hyphenated Americans”⁹ who refuse or fail to assimilate into the U.S. nation: “The mighty tide of immigration to our shores has brought in its train much of good and much of evil; and whether the good or the evil shall predominate depends mainly on whether these newcomers do or do not throw themselves heartily into our national life.”¹⁰

Roosevelt’s caution simultaneously reflected and influenced the collective attitude towards immigrants. Honig observes that in various deployments of the myth throughout history, “the foreigners whose immigrations to the United States daily reinstall the regime’s most beloved self-images are also looked on as threats to the regime.”¹¹ The history of U.S. immigration illustrates this somewhat conflicting paradox.

As a recent example, during his tenure as president, Barack Obama repeatedly referred to Emma Lazarus’ poem at the Statue of Liberty as he celebrated the legacy of the United States as a nation of immigrants. But every time, he acknowledged that the United States was also a nation of laws, including laws defining citizenship and terms of belonging. His words reinforced a central principle of immigration in contemporary sovereign regimes that a foreigner may not simply move to a country of their choosing; instead, they are expected to abide by laws and policies of the receiving nation that outline rules of entry and integration. Throughout U.S. history, the principle has been used to take advantage of, subordinate, and marginalize the immigrant both as an economic commodity and a threat to the nation. As Honig observes, the U.S. national imagination is “creative enough and well-funded enough to recuperate symbolic immigrant energies for national projects, while also often mistreating actual immigrants.”¹²

In this chapter, I offer a brief timeline of key events in U.S. immigration history which allows us to see the nation as an imagined community discursively constructed through processes of inclusion and exclusion. This history of an imagined and discursively constructed nation illustrates how, despite the tendency of contemporary immigration discourses to depict the United States as a “fixed geographical location, with borders that are defined, if porous,” the United States that immigrants settled into during the 18th and 19th centuries was “more of an aspirational concept than a defined physical reality.”¹³ In my discussion of this history, I reveal the ways in which the co-presence and particular interplays of xenophilia and xenophobia inform what Bonnie Honig identifies as the four versions of the myth of an immigrant nation. The perpetuation of these four myths entrenches the nationalization of U.S. civic politics, and has historically helped establish the discursive framework of legality/illegality to determine the different subject position of immigrants in the United States of America.

By discussing key moments in U.S. immigration history and by discussing how attitudes of xenophilia and xenophobia intersect in various deployments of the U.S. myth of an immigrant nation, I establish the context and exigences to which contemporary immigrant rights advocates respond with their rhetorical acts. This chapter lays the contextual groundwork for the three case studies that show how the protest rhetorics of different immigrant rights activists reaffirm, challenge, and sometimes reimagine belonging and citizenship in a nation-state. First, I offer a summary of Bonnie Honig’s, Michael Walzer’s, and Hiroshi Motomura’s discussions of the different iterations of the myth of the United States as an immigrant nation. Next, I assess how the different iterations have been reflected in U.S. immigration policy throughout history. I then

discuss how U.S. immigration policy in the 20th century gradually produced the conditions of illegality, as it began to target Latinx immigrants through increases in border enforcement measures at the U.S.-Mexico border as well as in the interior of the country. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of how these developments inspired the rise of immigrant rights activism in the early 21st century.

Four Myths of an Immigrant Nation

Unlike the common tendency to broadly refer to the United States as a nation of immigrants, Bonnie Honig argues that there are four distinct iterations of the myth - capitalist, communitarian, familial, and liberal - each based on different commitments and understandings of what constitutes a nation. Because of these different iterations, Honig presents an image of a nation that is unsure of itself, is conflicted about its roots, and is uncertain about the role of immigrants in society. Nevertheless, in each iteration of the myth the foreigner is celebrated as “an agent of national reenchantment that might rescue the regime from corruption and return it to its first principles.”¹⁴ At the same time, the foreigner is also feared for his or her difference which is seen as a threat to the norms of the nation’s imagined community. In the next several pages, I outline how this dichotomy plays out in the four iterations of the myth.

In what Honig calls the “capitalist” iteration of the myth, the hard-working and entrepreneurial immigrant reassures “workers of the possibility of upward mobility in an economy that rarely delivers on that promise, while also disciplining native-born poor, domestic minorities, and unsuccessful foreign laborers into believing that the economy fairly rewards dedication and hard work.”¹⁵ As such, the hard-working immigrant fulfills an ideological function to validate the greatness of the U.S. nation, keeping “the

American Dream alive, upholding popular beliefs in a meritocratic economy in good times and bad.”¹⁶ This iteration of the myth is therefore characterized by a xenophilic attitude toward immigrants as foreigners who have something to offer the nation.

However, “because the capitalist foreigner is depicted as someone who is interested only in material things,” he or she can quickly become feared for their potential to take from the nation.¹⁷ These xenophilic and xenophobic reactions to the capitalist immigrant are two sides of the same coin that treats the foreigner solely as an economic unit that either adds to or takes from the nation’s economy. Honig bemoans the negative impacts of this “capitalist” iteration of the myth, arguing that “the resources of democratic citizenship are diminished, not enhanced, by a supplement of foreignness that is made to stand for privatization, the accumulation of extreme wealth, and a complete disinterest in civic and political life.”¹⁸ She adds that this iteration of the myth “celebrates radical inequalities that are in deep tension with democratic citizenship.”¹⁹ The capitalist immigrant is not politically engaged and, thus, remains a relative outsider to the democratic core of U.S. society and the nation.

In Honig’s second iteration of the myth of an immigrant nation, called the “familial” iteration, immigrants are seen “as the saviors of traditional patriarchal family arrangements that have been variously attenuated by capitalist mobility and materialism, liberal individualism and feminism.”²⁰ The arrival of patriarchal immigrants with Old World masculinities and femininities carries the potential to revamp “proper gender roles and relations for a nation that has lost its sexual bearings.”²¹ In celebrating traditional gender roles and norms, this iteration of the myth focuses predominantly on the influx of foreign women into the national community. Foreign brides are celebrated for their

potential to mimic the traditional feminine wife who restores the patriarchal family and props up New World masculinity. But like the “capitalist” iteration of the myth, the xenophilic celebration of foreignness for its potential to restore and reinvigorate traditional family structures ushers in two xenophobic responses. The first is manifested in the real and imagined fears of foreign brides who might fraudulently use their husbands to gain entry into the U.S. nation and, thus, cheapen both the institution of marriage and the institution of citizenship.²² Secondly, xenophobic attitudes also emerge out of fears that these patriarchal immigrants pose as “threats to the rough (very rough) gender equalities that are American liberal democracy’s ambiguous achievement,” in that they “revalorize female powerlessness and male power.”²³ The “capitalist” and “familial” iterations of the myth have been deployed concomitantly throughout U.S. history to celebrate male immigrant workers and docile female domestic workers, as well as to vilify those perceived as economic burdens and “takers,” and those who do not conform to traditional patriarchal family norms. This leads to a third way of approaching the myth of an immigrant United States, in which the immigrant is seen as a member of local and national communities.

This third, “communitarian,” iteration of the myth celebrates the infusion of ethnic and cultural communities who strengthen the imagined national community. A proponent of this version, Michael Walzer cautions against the “capitalist” iteration and its underpinning ideology of individualism, because for him it threatens the “necessary collectivism of both politics and culture” within a nation.²⁴ For Walzer, “the communitarian immigrant imports a form of citizenship that liberal capitalist America is always in danger of losing or consuming.”²⁵ Walzer argues that “citizens are not effective

one by one but only when they are bound together in states or freely associated in parties, interest groups, or social movements. And culture is not sustained by private men and women but by families, nations, and communities of faith.”²⁶ In a way, the communitarian myth that Walzer champions is designed to respond to “the dissolution of family and community ties, or the prevention of community formation that results in large part from a capitalist economy’s unresisted need for a mobile labor force.”²⁷ Walzer’s communitarian iteration of an immigrant nation celebrates the infusion of Italian, Irish, Chinese, Japanese, or Greek immigrant communities, but only insofar as their diversity complements, not detracts from, the overall identity of the U.S. nation.

Even though Walzer argues that “the United States is an association of citizens,” who are “Americans only by virtue of having come together,” and not by some predefined “American” identity, his embrace of the communitarian immigrant is also plagued by the interplay of xenophilia and xenophobia.²⁸ For as much as diverse immigrant communities are celebrated for their contributions to national democracy, they are also seen as potentially “threatening enclaves that reject American values even while in our midst.”²⁹ The problem emerges because the communitarian xenophilic celebration of foreignness is reserved only for the kind of immigrant communities that conform to the established communal norms of the U.S. nation. But these communities of immigrants are never perceived as full members of the nation and instead become known as hyphenated-Americans.

For Honig, Walzer’s “communitarian” iteration of the myth straddles a somewhat perplexing line between a celebration of democratic politics which, he argues, is “bound to be... ‘Eurocentric,’ for democracy is in fact largely a European creation,” and an

embrace of a form of multiculturalism that acknowledges *difference*, but only insofar as it is “Americanized without being melted down or assimilated.”³⁰ Walzer recognizes the challenge, noting that “the crucial problem of the politics of difference is to encompass the actually existing differences within some overarching political structure.”³¹ He assumes a pre-defined United States as a “political nation of cultural nationalities,” that is nonetheless grounded in a dominant English and Protestant culture.³² Noting that immigrants did not assimilate entirely into this culture and managed to sustain separate cultural identities, Walzer commits two mistakes. First, his argument privileges and reaffirms the idea that a nation is sustainable only if it has a common identity core and political culture. In the case of the United States, he notes the necessity to converge or assimilate into one, as inscribed in the seal of the United States (*E pluribus unum*), which happens to be determined by the original white English settlers, not by the egalitarian and democratic principles outlined in the U.S.’s founding documents. Second, Walzer generalizes and reduces the history of inclusion by celebrating only the ethnic, cultural, and religious communities of immigrants whose differences were compatible and could be integrated within the dominant U.S. culture. Indeed, the political activism and community formation of groups that have historically contradicted the nation’s “traditional” English and Protestant origins are often obscured, and even vilified, in the communitarian version of the myth of an immigrant nation as groups that dilute or threaten the nation’s identity.

This presents a dilemma, in which foreignness becomes a spectrum, on which some immigrants’ cultural, racial, or religious difference is seen as a welcome addition to the U.S. national community, while others’ difference is seen as *too foreign*, thus

incompatible with a relatively homogenous, yet diverse, U.S. nation. Honig summarizes this paradoxical co-presence of xenophilia and xenophobia, arguing that “the deployment of foreignness as a restorative supplement” to the nation’s capitalist, communitarian, and familial institutions positions immigrants as “the original cause of the very institutional illness they are supposed to be curing.”³³

Finally, Honig identifies a fourth version of the myth of an immigrant America which, I argue, can be traced in aspects of the other three. The “liberal” iteration of the myth of an immigrant nation celebrates the idea of consent and the idea of immigration as a contract.³⁴ Immigrants perform the official social contract of the nation’s democratic regime by naturalizing to citizenship, which means “(re)enacting for established citizens the otherwise too abstract universalism of America’s democratic constitutionalism.”³⁵ In contrast to the *tacit* consent of the native born, the foreigner consents *explicitly* to the regime and, as such, testifies to the choice-worthiness of the American nation. But the choice relies on the mutual consent and contract between citizens and foreigners. Not only do foreigners have to choose the U.S., but the U.S. also has to choose them. And therein lies the, by now familiar, double bind of xenophilia and xenophobia. Honig explains that, “in American political culture, the good, consenting immigrant, the model of proper, consensual American citizenship, is shadowed by the bad immigrant, the “illegal alien” who undermines consent in two ways: he never consents to American laws, and “we” never consent to his presence on ‘our’ territory.”³⁶

In the following section, I provide an overview of U.S. immigration history as a way to show how the different iterations of the myth of an immigrant nation influenced policies and rhetoric that welcomed some immigrants and excluded others. The specific

events I examine also reveal the ways in which the logics of democratic liberalism and the idea of consent are invoked in the other three iterations of the myth whenever the foreigner becomes a threat to the nation's capitalist, familial, or communitarian ideals. That is to say, the xenophilic embrace of immigrants as either contributing workers, saviors of the traditional family, or upstanding community members, depends on the consent of the U.S. nation and the fulfilment of an implied contract by immigrants. Similarly, the xenophobic rejection and vilification of immigrants who "steal American jobs," do not conform to patriarchal and heteronormative family values, or refuse to conform to the norms of U.S. American culture, are grounded in the immigrants' failure to fulfill the social contract with their welcoming nation, which does not consent to their presence. Finally, events and policies from U.S. immigration history illustrate how the different deployments of the myth of an immigrant nation and the liberal idea of consent discursively positioned particular groups of foreigners as the always-already undesirable "illegal aliens" who pose a threat to the imagined national community.

The Birth of U.S. Immigration Law

Established as an escape from Europe's Old World of religious prosecution and despotic governance, the United States of America became a country founded on migration and settler colonialism. These pressures fostered an experiment with democracy as a new system of governance. Alexis de Tocqueville famously remarked that "civilized man" would "attempt to construct society upon a new basis" on the coasts of this New World with "those coasts so well suited for trade and industry, those deep rivers, that inexhaustible valley of the Mississippi—in short, the whole continent—seemed the yet empty cradle of a great nation."³⁷ He believed that "the Indians occupied

but did not possess the land.”³⁸ It was the English settlers who would cultivate and civilize the New World, exercising “rights of sovereignty” without the knowledge or authorization from the colonial “motherland,” England:

The new settlers, without denying the supremacy of the homeland, did not derive from thence the source of their powers, and it was only thirty or forty years afterward, under Charles II, that a royal charter legalized their existence.³⁹

In 1792, James Madison praised the practices of “settlers,” arguing that “in Europe charters of liberty are granted by power [while] in America... charters of power are granted by liberty.” Bonnie Honig rightfully points out the quintessentially democratic character of the practice of “taking rights and privileges rather than waiting for them to be granted by a sovereign power.”⁴⁰ Popular political action and deliberation were the foundation on which the nation’s system of governance was built.

In these early iterations of the “nation of immigrants” ideology, English settlers occupied a privileged position as always-already belonging and as the prototypical “Americans.” Indeed, in writing *The Federalist Papers*, John Jay argued that “the people of America” had a homogenous core identity as “one united people - a people descended from the same ancestors, speaking the same language, professing the same religion, attached to the same principles of government, very similar in their manners and customs, and who, by their joint counsels, arms, and efforts.”⁴¹ Paul Spickard explains that, “while the nation-of-immigrants ideology perfunctorily recognizes that the people who came to North America from England were immigrants, it does not treat them that way,” and instead “it posits the English as by definition native to the American Landscape, and measures others with respect to English Americans.”⁴²

In those early days, the English settlers welcomed immigration. Hiroshi Motomura observes that, “many states and territories recruited immigrants with advertisements both overseas and at ports of entry in America, sometimes with tax breaks and other financial incentives,” adding that “many Americans believed that it was part of the nation’s essence to take in immigrants seeking a better life.”⁴³ The invitation was based on the xenophilic embrace of immigrants as those who would create families and communities, which would boost the nation-building efforts of English settlers. As such, the newly founded democratic regime welcomed immigrants from particular geographic regions, and carried with it an impulse to exclude those who would hinder efforts to build a unified new nation. But the belief that the original English settlers were de facto natives, and the prototypical U.S. Americans, became a rhetorical mainstay and discursive yardstick by which to determine the belonging or exclusion of all future immigrants. Indeed, as Emily Ironside and Lisa Corrigan observe, “narratives of exclusionary nationalism emerge throughout the history of the United States,” adding that “while they adapt over time to shifting political tides as well as demographics, they consistently favor the white elite within American society, granting it the power rhetorically to construct and enforce a hegemonic narrative of what it meant to be American.”⁴⁴

In 1790, the United States’ first Naturalization Act reflected John Jay’s argument for a nation of *one* people, defining only “free white persons” as eligible and worthy of becoming U.S. citizens. Erika Lee notes that “the act established a racially-encoded hierarchy of American citizenship that endured well until the mid-twentieth century.”⁴⁵ Defining belonging in this new nation as the exclusive purview of whites had pernicious

long-term effects on immigration policy and the very concept of U.S. citizenship. Indeed, white nativism and xenophobia as driving factors in U.S. American nationalism predated John Jay's definition of "an American people," and can be seen in Benjamin Franklin's fears and warnings about German and other "swarthy" immigrants who might change or dilute the English character of the nation.⁴⁶ When President John Adams signed the Alien and Sedition Acts in 1798, it was rationalized by the Federalists' fear of what they saw as calls for secession by French immigrants who allegedly wanted to dissolve the newly founded U.S. nation.⁴⁷ By the middle of the nineteenth century, national sentiment was characterized by fears of Italian, Irish, Greek, and Polish immigrants who were cast as "non-whites" or "in-between people" unsuitable for self-government.⁴⁸ These communities were deemed too different and incompatible with the perceived English core of the nation. Despite xenophobic attitudes, they were, for the most part, allowed to enter the United States and attempt to assimilate into what was developing as an allegedly unified nation. Immigrants from Asia and Africa were treated more harshly, with Africans being treated as property to be exploited, and Asians being labeled as "aliens ineligible for citizenship." Overall, in these early years of the United States, attitudes of xenophilia and xenophobia fell predominantly within the "communitarian" myth of an immigrant nation.

Furthermore, the idea of consent embedded in the "liberal" iteration of the myth influenced early immigration laws, such as the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798, which played a key role in the discursive and legal construction of the term "alien" and the practice of deportation. They allowed the president of the United States to order non-citizens deemed dangerous to the nation to depart. The 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act

extended this power by including the first deportation statute that targeted Chinese people as a class. During World War II, President Franklin Roosevelt relied on the updated Alien Enemies Act to order the apprehension and deportation of Japanese, Italian, and German aliens as enemies of the U.S. nation.⁴⁹ Starting with the 1924 Immigration Act, Congress broadened the statute of the Alien Act to target not just “aliens” who pose a threat to the nation, but all who had entered the country in violation of U.S. immigration law.⁵⁰ Even today, “noncitizens, including lawful immigrants, have no absolute guarantee that they will be allowed to stay in the United States.”⁵¹ Motomura notes that the word “alien” is standard usage in immigration law and policy, but it is worth noting that, much like race, it is socially constructed and inscribed into law as a way to justify the differential treatment of foreigners in the nation-state.⁵² Kevin Johnson argues that “the term alien serves as a device that intellectually legitimizes the mistreatment of noncitizens and helps mask human suffering,” adding that “by distinguishing between aliens and persons, society is able to reconcile the disparate legal and social treatment afforded the two groups,” and that “to further rationalize the differential mistreatment, aliens may be ‘racialized,’ even if they are, at least by appearance, ‘white.’”⁵³

Crucially, Johnson points out that “illegal alien” is a “pejorative term that implies criminality,” but one that was not legally defined in the Immigration and Nationality Act or any prior legislation.⁵⁴ Despite its lack of legal basis, the term has become a standard commonplace in contemporary discourses about U.S. immigration. Seemingly race neutral, the terms “alien” and “illegal alien” have “increasingly become associated with racial minorities” and are used pejoratively to suggest that the “persons who fall in this category deserve punishment, not legal protection,” and that the appropriate punishment

is their deportation.⁵⁵ The “alien” terminology is rooted in a xenophobic rejection of foreigners who do not fit into an allegedly homogenous national community or have broken their social contract with the nation. Their crime is their difference and their refusal/inability to conform to a community with a perceived English core.

Race and ethnicity were not the only factors of exclusion in U.S. nation-building. Erika Lee observes that “women of all ethnic groups have also been disproportionately affected by United States immigration laws which often made assumptions about gender and proper familial relations between men and women.”⁵⁶ Gender played a role that was equally powerful in determining who could become a U.S. citizen and, further, what their rights and roles in the alleged democracy would be. In the early days, American colonies were largely populated by men, and women were seen as a valuable and rare import. There was a xenophilic embrace of foreign women, because they were needed as wives and child bearers in the developing nation. But they were not granted the same citizenship and rights as men. It took more than a century and decades of women’s rights activism for the United States officially to give women democracy’s fundamental right to vote.⁵⁷ On the immigration front, foreign women would continue to be welcomed as valuable import commodities, as foreign brides and domestic workers, who would revitalize the patriarchal gender norms of U.S. families.⁵⁸ At the same time, they would be targeted as threats to the nation’s character and moral code, as potential prostitutes or public charges, and in the late 20th century, as carriers of “anchor babies.”⁵⁹

All the while, the myth of the United States of America as a nation of immigrants kept its enticing allure both to U.S. citizens and hopeful foreigners alike. The “golden doors” at both Ellis Island and Angel Island were gateways that swung wide open for

some and remained shut for others. It is important to note that the 1790 Naturalization Act did not restrict the migration of people (that was often regulated by the individual states), and only pertained to regulating who could qualify for U.S. citizenship and membership in the nation. Erika Lee notes that “nativism and xenophobia had always been part of the history of immigration in the United States, but beginning in the late nineteenth century, anti-immigrant sentiment grew to such proportions that the federal government yielded to nativist demands and restricted immigration.”⁶⁰ Hiroshi Motomura observes that “by the 1880 presidential election, both the Democratic and Republican Party platforms called for restrictions on Chinese immigration.”⁶¹ Economic concerns, as well as concerns over the racial makeup of the nation, influenced the passage of restrictive legislation from the late 19th century and well into the 20th century.

The first major federal legislation that restricted immigration was the Page Act of 1875, which prohibited the entry of immigrants deemed “undesirable.” The act sought to “end the danger of cheap Chinese labor and immoral Chinese women.”⁶² Several years later, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 further entrenched the provisions of the Page Law as it “prohibited the further immigration of Chinese laborers, allowed only a few select classes of Chinese immigrants to apply for admission, and affirmed the prohibition of naturalized citizenship on all Chinese immigrants.”⁶³ As a result of the two acts, the same Chinese immigrants that had been welcomed as cheap laborers to help build the nation’s railroad system became perceived as moral threats, economic burdens, and unwelcome competitors for “American jobs.”⁶⁴ The Page Act of 1875 and consequent Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 set the precedent for future laws that restricted the immigration of “undesirables.” Peter Schuck argues that control over which foreigners

might enter was seen as a “powerful expression of the nation’s identity and autonomy – in a word, of its sovereignty,” in which “aliens’ natural rights to pursue their self-interest through migration were now regulated according to considerations of national interest, sovereignty, and power.”⁶⁵ Gone was the idealism of the nation as a democratic experiment. James Madison’s and Alexis de Tocqueville’s celebrations of a nation of people who act democratically and do not wait for a sovereign power to grant them rights and liberty had reverted to the old model of governments defining who may be included as a citizen and a member of the nation.

Following the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, the U.S. Congress passed legislation that further narrowed the limits of inclusion in ways that sought to protect the nation’s perceived Anglo-Saxon identity and its economic interests. Inter-ethnic fighting contributed to the formation of a racial order of exclusion, as Japanese immigrants celebrated their strong work ethic and bemoaned the influx of the “lowly Chinese.”⁶⁶ In the 1890s, “hostility to Japanese immigrants grew with their numbers, largely paralleling the earlier resentment of the Chinese.”⁶⁷ Race, national origin, and a struggling economy intersected in the exclusionary impulses of the nation. Gender also played a part in this order of exclusion, as Chinese women were perceived as potential prostitutes, who would degrade the nation’s moral code, and Japanese and Korean women were imported as “picture brides.”⁶⁸ In 1907, the “Gentleman’s Agreement” between the U.S. and Japan severely curtailed the immigration of Japanese workers to the U.S.⁶⁹ A decade later, the Immigration Act of 1917 established the “Asiatic Barred Zone,” with which “the United States effectively excluded all immigrants from India, Burma, Siam, the Malay States, Arabia, Afghanistan, part of Russia, and most of the Polynesian Islands.”⁷⁰ In 1921, U.S.

Congress passed the Quota Act, followed by the Immigration Act of 1924. These two pieces of legislation sought to further secure the Anglo-Saxon character of the nation. Erika Lee explains that “the Quota Act of 1921 limited European immigration to 3 percent of the number of foreign-born people of each nationality residing in the United States in 1910.”⁷¹ The Immigration Act of 1924 further reduced the number to 2 percent and moved the date to 1890, when immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe had not yet arrived. In addition, the two acts secured the bar on immigrants from the “Asiatic Barred Zone.” The 1924 Immigration Act effectively put an end to immigration from Asia and most of Europe. Racial restrictions and national origin quotas remained official provisions in U.S immigration law until the 1952 and 1965 immigration acts respectively.

In the following section, I discuss how immigration law and discourses during the 20th century positioned Mexican immigrants as “illegal aliens” and subjects deserving of deportation. This history begins with the Mexican-American War in the middle of the 19th century and continues with the racial restrictions and national origin quotas imposed on immigrants in the early 20th century. Furthermore, it traces the development of U.S. immigration policy in creating the conditions of illegality, attaching them predominantly to Latinx immigrants, and establishing an elaborate border enforcement regime to police and restrict the entry of “illegal” Latinx migrants. This history provides important context, illustrating how the discursive production of “illegal aliens” and the enforcement of immigration policy “gave rise to an oppositional political and legal discourse, which imagined deserving and undeserving illegal immigrants and, concomitantly, just and unjust deportations.”⁷² The different iterations of the myth of an immigrant nation overviewed in this section establish the context for contemporary anti-immigrant

sentiment and discourses as the products of the ever-so-powerful interplay of xenophilia and xenophobia.

U.S Immigration Law and Latinx Immigrants as “Illegals”

Even as early U.S. immigration laws sought to restrict immigration from Asia and parts of Europe, prior to the 1920s the U.S. southern border and immigration from Mexico remained largely unregulated.⁷³ For most of the 19th and the early 20th centuries, immigration from Mexico was not addressed by the federal government, with only a handful of immigration inspectors patrolling the border on horseback. At the end of the Mexican-American War in 1848, the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo brought to the United States “large populations whose race and ethnicity continued to set them apart even if the expansion of the frontier gave them citizenship.”⁷⁴ The treaty granted U.S. citizenship to Mexican nationals who lived in the newly-ceded territories, creating a paradoxical contradiction with the 1790 Naturalization Act which restricted citizenship only to “free whites.” As a compromise, Mexicans had to be, at least on paper, recognized as white. In the decades following the Mexican-American War, people continued to travel between the two countries without formal restrictions due to the U.S.’s “good neighbor” policy. But as the numbers of migrant workers from Mexico increased and the needs of the U.S. economy changed, the border between the two countries became “more than just a line on a map demarcating the geographic separation between the two countries.”⁷⁵ With new restrictions placed in the 20th century and with increased concerns about the racial makeup of the U.S. nation, the U.S.-Mexico border came to engender “a discourse that encompasses the social, political, and physical confines of social and geographic space.”⁷⁶

Immigration historian Hiroshi Motomura writes that in the late 19th and early 20th centuries “farmers in the southwestern United States began to rely heavily on Mexican laborers, lawful and unlawful,” adding that the 1906 economic depression and 1910 Mexican Revolution “caused the first heavy influx of Mexicans looking for work in the United States.”⁷⁷ Following World War I and the strict immigration quotas imposed on countries from the Eastern hemisphere by the 1924 Immigration Act, Mexico became the primary source of cheap migrant labor on which the U.S. grew increasingly dependent.⁷⁸ Lisa Flores observes that during the 1920s, “agricultural and industrial business working with journalists and political leaders crafted a narrative of need in which Mexicans became positioned as an ideal immigrant workforce.”⁷⁹ This xenophilic embrace of the Mexican immigrant deployed the “capitalist” iteration of the nation of immigrants myth. Flores explains that “central in a narrative of need, Mexicans were rhetorically characterized such that they were seen as meeting the goals of the nation without bringing with them the horrors associated with common characterizations of southern/eastern Europeans and Asians.”⁸⁰ By the 1930s, the number of Mexican immigrants had reached almost 600,000 and would continue to grow exponentially for the remainder of the century. But the xenophilic embrace of migrant Mexican laborers also triggered its xenophobic counterpart, as economic anxieties and the Great Depression amplified racist and xenophobic attitudes toward the “taking” Mexican immigrant, who stole “American jobs.” The discursive interplay of xenophilia and xenophobia ushered a perceived need to control the movement and migration of people at the U.S.-Mexico border. The 1924 Immigration Act established the U.S. Border Patrol as an official agency and a control mechanism that would monitor and regulate the flow of people at the border with

Mexico. With an agency to police migration, the newly materialized U.S.-Mexico border established a rhetorical line that separated “us” from “them.” The separation was further entrenched in 1929, when U.S. Congress passed a law that criminalized the undocumented entry of foreigners, making reentry a felony punishable by imprisonment.⁸¹

As a result of these developments, by 1930, the national discourse about Mexican immigrants changed, with the words “alien” and “illegal alien” appearing regularly.⁸² Mae Ngai notes the irony of the association of Mexican immigrants as the prototypical illegal aliens, “because, unlike Europeans, they were not subject to numerical quotas and, unlike Asiatics, they were not excluded as racially ineligible to citizenship.”⁸³ Nevertheless, the criminalization of the Mexican body led to a campaign to deport “undesirable aliens,” rationalized by the need to secure jobs for unemployed U.S. citizens. The campaign extended throughout the decade, with Guerin-Gonzalez noting that “the 1930s marked the first time in the history of international migration between the U.S. and other countries that the federal government sponsored and supported the mass expulsion of immigrants.”⁸⁴ Early campaigns did not deport large numbers of Mexicans, but the increasingly hostile national sentiment led to the “voluntary departure” of half a million Mexicans by the end of the 1930s.⁸⁵ Lisa Flores astutely notes the rhetorical dynamics at play, in that wide-spread xenophobia and the threat of deportation presented in media discourses at the time were mobilizing factors for the departure and future marginalization and criminalization of Mexican immigrants.⁸⁶ Essentially, by the early 1930s, “the emphasis on criminality and the criminalization of entry combined to provide a rhetorical space in which the Mexican body became a criminal body,” which “came to

signify illegal alien and, potentially, every Mexican/American became a walking target.”⁸⁷

Nonetheless, Mexican immigrants continued to be seen as cheap, replaceable, and docile laborers, or peons.⁸⁸ Somewhat ironically, Mexican migrant laborers were welcomed *because* of their difference. Flores notes that the dominant perception was that “unlike other undesirable populations, Mexicans were unlikely to save enough money either to move into semi-skilled positions or be able to buy land or other permanent residencies in the U.S.”⁸⁹ Racist stereotypes drove this perception of Mexicans as unwilling and unable to assimilate and integrate into U.S. society, or as Likely Public Charges in the nation’s economy.⁹⁰ As such, they were a welcome addition to the U.S. economy, but only as long they remained docile and temporary, and didn’t pose a threat to the communal, familial, and racial norms of the U.S. nation.

The temporary status of migrant workers from Mexico was officially sanctioned by the state during World War II, when the country began to experience labor shortages. In 1942, the U.S. government signed the Mexican Farm Labor Agreement with Mexico, better known as the Bracero Program. The program provided temporary legal status to migrant workers from Mexico, for as long as their services were needed by U.S. farms and factories. The program lasted until 1964 and during its time migrant workers were abused, underpaid (or not paid at all), brought in illegally and deported repeatedly, only to be let in the following year.⁹¹ Mae Ngai observes that despite the legal provisions of the Bracero Program, U.S. farmers continued to recruit and hire Mexicans who entered the country without authorization.⁹² Hiroshi Motomura concludes that “dependence on Mexican labor spread to other industries and regions,” and “employers knew or soon

learned that unlawful workers would be easier to control than lawful ones.”⁹³ Due to their precarious position, they could be underpaid and easily disposed of. In total, the Bracero Program recruited over two million Mexican migrant workers but also served as impetus for others to enter the U.S. without authorization and seek work.⁹⁴ In 1943, a year after the start of the Bracero Program, the U.S. Border Patrol increased the number of immigration officers along the border in an effort to curtail unauthorized crossings, which began a trend and an obsession with control of the border that continues in the 21st century.⁹⁵ It was the perceived threat of Mexican migrant workers remaining in the U.S. indefinitely that triggered a xenophobic reaction to the previous xenophilic embrace of the migrant worker.

In 1952, the Immigration and Nationality Act established a new category of H-visas for temporary workers in the U.S. Allegedly race-neutral, the new visa category allowed for either highly-educated foreigners or seasonal agricultural migrant workers to apply for temporary employment in the U.S., as long as they did not displace any U.S. citizens from their jobs. Despite the new law, farmers in the Southern and Southwestern regions of the United States continued to recruit migrant workers from Mexico and encouraged their unauthorized entry. Either officially sanctioned by the U.S. government or sneaked in without authorization, Mexican migrants continued to work in U.S. farms and factories for decades. In the meantime, they started families, brought family members with them, and ultimately, became a relative mainstay in U.S. society.

The evolution of the Bracero Program into the temporary work visa program for agricultural workers shows that the U.S. not only allowed, but has continuously incentivized, migrant workers from Mexico. Bonnie Honig’s discussion of the

“capitalist” iteration of the myth of an immigrant nation is instructive, as it explains the dynamics through which Mexican immigrants could be welcomed and rejected at the same time. Since the beginning of the Bracero Program, the U.S. cooperated with Mexico to deport migrant workers back to Mexico. The sustained deportation drive culminated in 1954 when President Dwight Eisenhower implemented Operation Wetback. The president appointed immigration officers to conduct raids that would apprehend and deport aliens who either entered the country without authorization or had overstayed their temporary work visas. More than a million people were apprehended, including authorized Bracero workers and Mexican-Americans who were U.S. citizens.⁹⁶ The apprehended were put on buses, trains, and boats, sometimes in the middle of the night, and dropped off in central Mexico, with little regard for their safety or health.⁹⁷ The dragnet approach of Operation Wetback targeted anyone who “looked” like an “illegal.” The program was grounded in the previously established image of Mexicans as criminals, and it further secured that image in the nation’s psyche. Officially, Operation Wetback was a one-year effort by the Eisenhower administration designed to address the problem of unauthorized immigration but in reality the program never really ended. Apprehensions and deportation of suspected “illegals” and visa over-stayers continued until the end of the Bracero program in 1964. Effectively, the program established the infrastructure and mechanisms of border control and deportation that continue to this day.

Alongside programs that rhetorically constructed an image of Mexican immigrants as always/already criminals and outsiders to the U.S. nation, racial prejudice toward Mexicans extended to Filipino immigrants. They occupied a rather precarious position of in-between-ness, because they were from Asia, but could also be mistaken as

Mexicans. Even though the 1924 Immigration Act continued to restrict immigration from the “Asiatic barred zone,” immigrants from the Philippine islands were exempt because Spain had ceded the islands to the United States at the end of the 1898 Spanish-American War, making the Philippines a U.S. American colony. The 1924 act clarified that “citizens of the islands under the jurisdiction of the United States shall not be held as aliens.”⁹⁸ Despite their protected status, immigrants from the Philippines were treated with similar xenophobic attitudes as those toward other Asian immigrants in the past, with anti-Filipino violence escalating in late 1920s and early 1930s California.⁹⁹ Filipinos were perceived both to “menace” the “livelihood of industrial workers, farmers and small tradesmen,” but also to threaten to the nation’s racial and familial order, as most Filipino immigrants were young men and the law barred them, as “Mongolians,” from marrying white women.¹⁰⁰

Furthermore, Filipino immigrants occupied an in-between status as neither aliens, nor citizens. A primary complaint against their presence in the U.S. was that they “upset the existing racial hierarchy between whites and nonwhites.”¹⁰¹ Even though the 1924 Immigration Act exempted them from “alien” status, the 1898 Treaty of Paris, at the end of the Spanish-American War, did not define a provision for their U.S. citizenship and the prior 1790 Naturalization Act denied their naturalization as non-whites. Denied citizenship on the basis of their race, and deemed undesirable and unassimilable into the U.S. nation, Filipinos were eventually barred from entry along with other Asian immigrants in 1934.¹⁰² Xenophobic and racist attitudes toward the “unassimilable” Filipinos led to the passage of the 1934 Tydings-McDuffie Act which reclassified

Filipinos as “aliens” and began a 10-year transition period toward Philippine independence.¹⁰³

Despite their differences, Mexicans and Filipinos share a common history as peoples who were at one point included as members (albeit not full members) of the U.S. nation, but were later reclassified as “aliens” on the basis of their non-white race and their perceived threat as economic burdens and “takers” of “American jobs.” Their histories show the intersections of xenophilia and xenophobia in the different iterations of the myth of an immigrant nation. Ultimately, racial difference became the driving force behind perceptions of Mexicans and Filipinos as either cheap and docile workers, or “takers” of “American jobs.”

It is worth noting that although after 1924 small numbers of undocumented immigrants from Europe and Canada were deported, the U.S. government created programs and exceptions that allowed undocumented European immigrants to regularize their status on the basis of their “good moral character” or their familial and communal connections. Ngai notes that “references to immigrants of good moral character were usually not racially explicit, but by definition such immigrants were unlikely to be Mexican because ‘Mexican’ had been constructed as a negative racial category.”¹⁰⁴ Later policies and reforms that allowed immigrants to regularize their status established that only European immigrants could qualify for forgiveness. Even though the policies did not explicitly exclude based on race, they explicitly disqualified Mexicans or citizens of islands adjacent to the United States.¹⁰⁵ By the middle of the century, it became possible for white European immigrants to escape the status of “illegal alien,” and argue against their “unjust” deportations because of the burden it would cause on their families. At the

same time, the national climate had cemented the reputation of Latinx immigrants as the always/already “illegal aliens,” who did not have the same esteemed family values and morals as European immigrants and whose only role in the United States was perceived as temporary and deportable farm workers. The 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act allegedly sought to address the injustice of U.S. immigration policy and its embedded system of racial preference. In reality, the act further entrenched racial stereotypes and norms of who belongs in the “nation of immigrants.”

Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 – A Turning Point?

As a result of the highly restrictive 1924 Immigration and Nationality Act, by the mid-20th century, the United States reached record low levels of foreign-born population. With Asian immigrants barred from admission and with the number of Eastern European immigrants reduced by national origin quotas, the only foreign population on the rise were Latinx immigrants, arriving predominantly from Mexico and the Philippines. The Bracero Program in tandem with deportation crackdowns, such as Operation Wetback, had created a revolving door of temporary low-skill laborers, who were neither immigrants, nor citizens. Migrant farm workers became seasonal and disposable “alien” workers, who served the interests of U.S businesses and the nation. Indeed, it was the changes in U.S. immigration policy that produced the conditions of illegality and discursively created a population of “illegal aliens” to be policed, exploited, and, potentially, removed.

Lauded as a turning point toward the liberalization of U.S. immigration policy, the 1965 Immigration Act had a profound impact on immigration from Mexico and Central America.¹⁰⁶ The act’s legacy and lasting influence stand in stark contrast to

President Lyndon B. Johnson's promise that it would not be "a revolutionary bill," it would "not affect the lives of millions," and it would "not reshape the structure of our daily lives."¹⁰⁷ However, Maddalena Marinari argues that the 1965 law did just that.¹⁰⁸ Contrary to the expectations and predictions of legislators and political leaders who hoped the new policy would invite more "traditional" immigrants from Europe, the new policy opened up the doors for immigrants from Asia, who had been excluded during the first half of the century.¹⁰⁹ Marilyn Halter and Christopher Capozzola observe that "the 1965 measure lifted quotas based on race and nationality and established new preferences for family reunification and those with desired professional skills."¹¹⁰ But even as the act removed the explicit language of exclusionary restrictions based on race and national origins from past immigration policies, historian Eithne Luibheid argues that the 1965 INA did not actually end the system of inequality and exclusions, but merely recomposed the system of restriction in ways that still treated non-white immigrants as less desirable.¹¹¹ The numeric quota for overall number of immigrants allowed each year remained, but now it applied to immigrants from the Western Hemisphere as well. Bill Ong Hing observes that efforts to restrict the numbers of immigrants from certain parts of the world would continue to define the legislative landscape of immigration policy in the second half of the 20th century.¹¹²

In particular, Hing argues that legislative efforts following the 1965 INA sought to rein in what was seen as the uncontrolled flood of immigrants from the Western Hemisphere, a region that prior to 1965 had no strictly enforced immigration quotas, as the U.S. needed cheap migrant labor.¹¹³ The new policy established a 20,000 immigrant cap to be enforced for immigrants from Mexico and other countries in Central America.

At the same time, as global and economic migration patterns began to change in the second half of the 20th century, more immigrants from Central America and Mexico began to move to the United States. As a result of the new restrictions, the large numbers of immigrants from Mexico and Central America who had previously been seen as necessary migrant or seasonal workers became “illegal” immigrants, subject to prosecution and removal.¹¹⁴

In the decades following the 1965 INA, subsequent immigration policies followed a tendency to appear to liberalize the U.S. immigration system.¹¹⁵ On the surface, U.S. immigration policy began to acknowledge the importance of family reunification and the admission of refugees as central pillars of immigration. In reality, it continued to subject immigrants to the needs of the ever-so-powerful neoliberal agenda of U.S. politics to maintain a population of cheap and exploitable labor. Nicholas De Genova explains this paradox, arguing that even policies intended to deter unauthorized migration “have nonetheless been instrumental in sustaining Mexican migration, but only by significantly restructuring its legal status as undocumented.”¹¹⁶ In 1986, the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), famously signed into law by President Ronald Reagan, revised U.S. refugee policy and allowed the legalization of undocumented immigrants who had entered the country prior to 1982. The 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act made it illegal to hire undocumented immigrants and introduced a universal process to verify one’s legal authorization to work in the United States. Despite this, the new policy did little to liberalize and humanize immigration, and instead continued the general direction of U.S. immigration policy toward more control of national borders and a strictly enforced entry system, further narrowing the limits of who qualifies as a desirable

worker/immigrant. Crucially, the 1986 IRCA was a landmark in U.S. immigration law because its “principal explicit preoccupation was undocumented immigration,” which contributed to the increasingly “pervasive equation of ‘illegal alien’ with ‘Mexican.’”¹¹⁷

The discursive production of “illegality” and its equation with Mexican and Latinx immigrants were also influenced by a renewed interest in the myth of a “nation of immigrants.” The passage of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act and the 1964 Civil Rights Act triggered a period of an unexpected white ethnic revival, which mobilized around the epic tale of the United States as a nation of immigrants. Matthew Frye Jacobson observes that it relocated the perceived normative whiteness and English origins of “Americans,” from “what might be called Plymouth Rock whiteness to Ellis Island whiteness.”¹¹⁸ This white ethnic revival recast U.S. American nationality, redrawing the lines between “us” and “them,” and, ultimately, cemented the idea that the “nation of immigrants” included only the original English colonists and those Europeans who later arrived at Ellis Island.¹¹⁹ The enfranchisement of African-Americans, and the increasing numbers of immigrants from Mexico, Central America, and Asia triggered a xenophilic embrace of immigrants with European heritage, as the Old Immigrants, because they represented the *correct* family values and communal institutions. At the same time, it xenophobically rejected Latinos and Asians as New Immigrants, who had to assimilate into established norms of “Americanness,” and who could be criminalized and rejected when they failed or refused to do so. Paul Spickard notes the injustices in this distinction between Old and New Immigrants, because it treats Mexicans as recent immigrants when most “are not immigrants at all, but rather the descendants of people who lived in lands that the United States conquered and took,” and because it

conveniently ignores the hundreds of thousands of Asian immigrants who arrived during the period of the Old Immigration, alongside European immigrants.¹²⁰ The immigrant assimilation model that was popularized by the white ethnic revival of the 1960s and 1970s influenced the still dominant images of Latinx and Asian immigrants as the always-already foreigners, regardless of their ancestry and history in the United States, and the image of the white European immigrant as the prototypical “American,” who belongs, regardless of his recent arrival in the United States.¹²¹

A rather peculiar example that illustrates both the idea that racial inequality still permeated through U.S. immigration policy and the idea that the government sought more control over immigrants was the provision of the 1990 Immigration Act which established a new category of immigrant visas for “diversity immigrants.” Hing discusses the irony of the “diversity lottery” visa program which, despite its name, actually facilitated the immigration of white European immigrants to the United States. To be considered “adversely affected” and thus qualify for a diversity visa, an applicant had to have no relatives in the United States, and had to be from a country that had received fewer visas after 1965 than before. The result was, Hing argues, that the “diversity visa” program was actually an effort to offset the family reunification program that allowed mostly Asian and Latinx immigrants to come to the United States in the decades since the 1965 INA.¹²² Imposing limits and restrictions on immigration from Mexico and Central America was rationalized in purportedly race-neutral language through a liberal concern about “fairness” for white European immigrants, as “our traditional friends and allies in Western Europe.”¹²³

Despite these efforts, the demographics of the U.S. nation continued to change, and the populations of Asian Americans and Hispanic Americans increased exponentially in the second half of the 20th century. By the early 1990s, anxieties about “illegal aliens” reached a boiling point, leading to California’s infamous Proposition 187 and federal legislation that sought to further close the borders of the nation.

Proposition 187 and Border Militarization

In 1994, voters in California passed the, now-infamous anti-immigration Proposition 187. The proposition sought to “eliminate public health, welfare, and education provisions for undocumented immigrants,” meanwhile recreating “demeaning depictions of undocumented workers, primarily from Mexico.”¹²⁴ Kent Ono and John Sloop point out the flawed logic of California’s anti-immigrant movement, explaining that undocumented immigrants were already disqualified from receiving public benefits. Nonetheless, the public perception and rhetoric about a growing problem with “illegal aliens,” mainly from Mexican origin, relied on the previously established always-already criminalized image of Latinx bodies. They were perceived xenophobically as “takers” of jobs from Californian workers, and as “takers” of public benefits reserved for Californian families and communities. Mexicans, and Latinx immigrants in general, became rhetorically positioned as outsiders in both the “capitalist,” “familial,” and “communitarian” deployments of the myth of an immigrant nation. And, as I argued earlier in the essay, they were also outsiders in the “liberal” iteration of the myth, as they were perceived as breaking a social contract with a nation that did not consent to their presence. California’s Proposition 187 was a landmark moment that would come to define the direction of immigration discourse and policy for decades because, as Ono and

Sloop argue, the “rhetoric of Proposition 187 fundamentally affects the way many will understand the meaning of ‘nation’ and its ‘borders,’” largely because it “shifts” the border into the interior of the nation.¹²⁵ By policing immigrant communities and restricting their access to public benefits, the rhetoric of Proposition 187 effectively attached the border to the bodies of Latinx immigrants, and citizens alike, in a way that turned them into a precarious population of national outsiders.¹²⁶

Coinciding the anti-immigrant rhetoric of Proposition 187, in 1994 the U.S. Border Patrol launched three major border protection initiatives - Operation Gatekeeper in California, Operation Hold-the-Line in Texas, and Operation Safeguard in Arizona. The operations increased the number of border patrol agents at the U.S.-Mexico border and, for the first time in history, sanctioned the construction of a physical barrier to prevent migrant crossings. This marked the birth not only of an exclusionary mechanism to stop migrant crossings, but also the rhetorical and material manifestation of the barrier between “us” and “them.” The border and the “illegal alien” were no longer imaginary, but became very real material objects that respectively protected or threatened the U.S. nation, in what De Genova describes as the “spectacle of enforcement.”¹²⁷

Following these developments, President William Clinton signed the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA), which formalized some of the provisions of California’s Proposition 187, increased the number of border patrol agents by 10,000, allocated funding for further fencing and surveillance infrastructure along the U.S.-Mexico border, and introduced periods of exclusion for immigrants unlawfully present in the United States.¹²⁸ The act also implemented Section 287(g), which granted state and local governments the power to enforce federal

immigration policy. This allowed local and state law enforcement agencies to police and surveil “illegality,” which targeted Mexican and Latinx immigrants, exacerbating their “sense of ever-present vulnerability” as always-already outsiders in the U.S. nation.¹²⁹

Legislative developments in the 1990s and early 2000s established a legal and discursive space in which Latinx bodies became subject to constant policing, surveillance, and suspicion of “illegality.” Marouf Hasian and Fernando Delgado explain that anti-immigrant rhetoric of the time employed economic and class vocabularies as ways to “avoid more objectionable forms of racism and xenophobia.”¹³⁰ Anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies no longer targeted racial difference but instead targeted the “alien” and “illegal” nature of those immigrants who posed as economic threat to their host communities, rhetorically producing a population of deportable subjects. De Genova argues that this “everyday production of migrant ‘illegality’ is never simply reducible to a presumed quest to achieve the putative goal of deportation,” but instead produces a constant state of deportability, which “has historically rendered Mexican labor as a distinctly disposable commodity.”¹³¹ Ideas of immigration as a contract and of a U.S. nation that does not consent to the presence of “illegals” became standard in immigration discourses of the new century. However, Bonnie Honig argues that, despite this popular framing of the U.S. state and nation as nonconsenting victims of lawbreaking migrants, “it is not at all clear that the state does *not* consent to the presence on its territory of large number of illegal immigrants.”¹³² She adds that “illegal immigration is not only combatted by the state; it is also simultaneously enabled, covertly courted, often managed, and certainly tolerated by it,” with U.S. citizens profiting “from the subsidies that cheap migrant labor provides to their child-care costs and food prices.”¹³³

Around the same time period of the late 1990s, anti-immigrant rhetoric began to adopt the argument of immigration as a contract. Honig notes that during the 1996 presidential election season, Peter Schuck & Rogers Smith's book *Citizenship without Consent: Illegal Aliens in the American Policy* gained significant attention and was "widely touted at the 1996 Republican Convention."¹³⁴ The authors presented the idea of a nation that did not consent to the presence of the so-called "illegal aliens," who had broken the terms of their contract with the U.S. people. Similarly, Anne Demo stresses that "campaign ads produced for the 1996 presidential election prophesied a nation imperiled by unassimilable 'illegals,'" adding that "the 2000 presidential campaign also traded in images of a nation transformed by newcomers."¹³⁵ The idea of immigrants breaking their contract with the U.S. people who did not consent to their presence became "the conceptual basis for emphasizing formal legal status and opposing anything that undermines a reliably sharp line between lawfully present noncitizens and illegal aliens."¹³⁶ Inventing and imagining this sharp divide between "legal" and "illegal" effectively positioned immigrants as less-than-human market commodities or entities in a contract with terms that were never clearly outlined and always subject to change.

Ironically, despite the continuous success of the U.S. Congress to pass more restrictive policies to curtail both legal and illegal immigration, the number of undocumented immigrants in the United States continued to increase in the early 21st century. These recent increases in both restrictive policies and number of undocumented immigrants illustrate that illegality is not a human condition, but instead is the product of political regimes which define the conditions of illegality. They also illustrate John Torpey's argument that regimes of documentation do not actually stop the migration of

people; instead, they establish a monopoly to determine what constitutes legitimate migration.¹³⁷ As a result of the relative failure of the U.S. nation-state to control and prevent unauthorized immigration in the past decades, national political discourse shifted toward a need for “comprehensive immigration reform,” which would address the multiple and long-standing issues with immigration that previous policies failed to address or, indeed, exacerbated. Notably, the debate had two sides, each showing a different perspective toward the problems with existing immigration policy. On one hand, conservative anti-immigrant advocates saw a need to reform an immigration policy that had failed to rein in unauthorized immigration. On the other hand, immigration advocates pushed to reform existing immigration policy, arguing that it had failed to establish a fair path to citizenship for deserving immigrants. The two sides represented the long-standing interplay of xenophilia and xenophobia. They rehashed old narratives of foreigners “stealing” U.S. jobs, threatening the familial and communitarian values of the U.S. nation, or narratives of foreigners as the praise-worthy “givers” to the U.S. economy.

These two opposing sides of the political debate created exigency to draft several bills in both the U.S. House and Senate, all under the veil of “comprehensive immigration reform.” Three major legislative efforts were proposed during George W. Bush’s second presidential term, and all three bills included provisions that: 1) increased resources for border security; 2) expanded employment eligibility verification programs and penalties for hiring unauthorized workers; and 3) broadened inadmissibility grounds, the categories of aliens subject to expedited removal and mandatory detention in the interest of national security.¹³⁸ The scope of the three bills and their emphasis on enforcement and control reflected the ideology and reasoning behind President George W. Bush’s determination to

achieve “comprehensive immigration reform” during his second term in office. Acting in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, President Bush approached immigration from Mexico as a security threat to the U.S. nation, establishing the Department of Homeland Security, and eventually signing the Secure Fence Act of 2006 in an effort to further reduce the flow of people across the U.S.-Mexico border. Notably, Bush’s legislative efforts followed the tone of the 1996 IIRIRA, as they expanded the number of immigration officers, both at the border and in the interior of the United States, further increased funding for surveillance technologies, and continued the construction of a border fence along the U.S.-Mexico border. That no terrorist had ever infiltrated the U.S. through its southern border was irrelevant.

The late 20th and early 21st centuries also saw the emergence of anti-immigration zealots like Arizona Sheriff Joe Arpaio, who took advantage of the Section 287(g) provisions of the 1996 IIRIRA, and took immigration policy enforcement into his own hands, apprehending and jailing suspected “illegal aliens.” Often bragging about his tough-on-crime approach, Arpaio became notorious for his inhumane treatment of migrants detained in his private prison outside of Phoenix, Arizona, known as “Tent City,” which he personally described as a “concentration camp.”¹³⁹ In 2010, Arizona Governor Janice Brewer signed into law SB1070, which required police officers to question people about their immigration status at their own discretion. The controversial law raised significant concerns about the tendency of police officers to question and suspect people they deemed to be “illegal” based on the way they looked.¹⁴⁰ Arizona’s bill would come to influence similar legislative efforts to be passed in Alabama, Georgia, Indiana, South Carolina, and Utah.¹⁴¹ These efforts further criminalized and entrenched

the image of the Latinx body as “illegal,” as always-already suspect, and as one that needs to be policed, jailed and, eventually, removed.

Like his predecessor, President Barack Obama claimed that immigration reform was a top priority for his administration, but the highly-anticipated S.B. 744 failed repeatedly to gain support in the House of Representatives. The bill was a compromise that eased some of the harshest measures of H.R. 4437, but maintained the focus on enforcement first, and a path to citizenship second. In the meantime, thousands of undocumented immigrants continued to be arrested and deported, despite President Obama’s assurances that only violent criminal offenders would be targeted. By 2016, Donald Trump’s bid for the U.S. presidency sparked new life into the rhetoric about “illegal aliens” of the mid-1990s, as he renewed the calls to strengthen border security by constructing a border wall, and called for deporting “illegal aliens” back to Mexico. The early days of his presidency were marked by attempts to institute a travel ban for citizens of certain countries with predominantly non-white populations.¹⁴² Allegedly, President Trump also questioned why the U.S. should accept immigrants from “shithole” African countries.¹⁴³ Instead, he stated his preference for “merit-based” immigration policy, and a discontinuation of previous family-reunification programs.¹⁴⁴ His rhetoric and actions illustrate a return to earlier U.S. immigration policy decision-making practices based on racial preference and national origin quotas. They illustrate the continued relevance of the competing attitudes of xenophilia and xenophobia, and the powerful rhetorical sway of the “capitalist” iteration of the myth of an immigrant nation.

In February 2018, the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) made the surprising announcement that the agency would be dropping the

phrase “nation of immigrants” from its official mission statement. The wording of the mission statement changed from one which acknowledged the diverse origins of the United States (“USCIS secures America’s promise as a nation of immigrants...”) into one that stressed the bureau’s enforcement function (“U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services administers the nation’s lawful immigration system...”).¹⁴⁵ The change reflected a long-standing clash between the U.S. as a “nation of immigrants” and simultaneously a “nation of laws.” The decision to eliminate the phrase “nation of immigrants” from USCIS’s mission statement is more than mere semantics; instead, it signals an ideological turn that would eventually influence future immigration policies. The revisionist turn was also seen in White House immigration adviser Stephen Miller’s attempt to downplay the significance of Lazarus’ poem in a 2017 press conference.¹⁴⁶ Erasing the phrase “nation of immigrants” and rhetorically erasing America’s promise engraved on the Statue of Liberty reflect a political attempt to change the nature of future U.S. immigration, but more importantly – to change the identity of the nation and the principles upon which it is built.

Even as this increasingly hostile climate of anti-immigrant discourse continues to marginalize and target poor and non-white immigrants, it also inspired the emergence of new types of protest rhetoric and activism in which immigrant rights advocates began loudly to claim their place and right to belong in the U.S nation.

Conclusion - Protesting “Illegality”

Immigrant rights activism started to become more visible and vocal in the mid-1990s. In response to California’s Proposition 187, 70,000 protesters marched in Los Angeles in March 1994. Two years later, 25,000 activists participated in the “La Marcha”

demonstration in Washington DC to protest the 1996 IIRIRA.¹⁴⁷ In the new century, immigrant rights activists continued to fight against the U.S. government's efforts to police the border and deport undocumented immigrants, and against the established discourse of "illegal aliens." In 2006, California activists organized "La Gran Marcha" to protest the anti-immigrant H.R. 4437, The Border Protection, Anti-terrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005. It resulted in the "largest mass public demonstration 'ever' seen in U.S. history," with estimated 500,000 to 1,500,000 people gathering in downtown Los Angeles on March 25, 2006.¹⁴⁸ Hundreds of thousands of protesters gathered in other cities to denounce and protest the bill, which would have increased penalties for undocumented immigrants and turned them into felons, eliminated the Diversity Visa Lottery program, and extended the border fence.¹⁴⁹

As extrajudicial vigilante groups, such as The Minuteman project, and Arizona Sheriff Joe Arpaio began to patrol and monitor the U.S.-Mexico border in efforts to supposedly deter migrant border crossers, activist groups such as the Border Angels left water bottles in the desert in an effort to prevent migrant deaths. The group also offered legal advice and protected migrants from unjust and illegal violence toward them. Their group's founder and leader, Enrique Morones protested discourses about "illegal aliens" and border militarization practices, instead advocating for a humane, but incremental, approach to immigration policy that would allow migrant workers and their families to become "documented."

During Barack Obama's presidency, undocumented immigrant youth began to self-organize or form grassroots immigrant rights organizations. They publicly disclosed their undocumented status during sit-ins, marches, high-school graduations, and TED

talks. These immigrant youth, commonly referred to as DREAMers, protested their life in the shadows and shared their stories of growing up in the United States without legal status, as they pleaded for formal inclusion into a national community they already felt as their own. Undocumented immigrants also launched campaigns against dominant media depictions of “illegal aliens.” Pulitzer-winning journalist Jose Antonio Vargas revealed his undocumented status in 2011, launching a series of campaigns and national tours of college campuses in an effort to redefine what it means to be an “American,” questioning the accepted norms of citizenship and belonging.

Notably, these forms of activism operate in the same discursive landscape defined by the four iterations of the myth of an immigrant nation and the competing attitudes of xenophilia and xenophobia. As this chapter has shown, the myth of an immigrant nation has been the foundation of U.S. immigration policy and discourses since the country’s early days. The different iterations of the myth and their embedded contrasting attitudes of xenophilia and xenophobia have helped us see the racialized dynamics of nation-building and U.S. citizenship. Throughout the years, concerns about the economy, traditional family values, and communal norms scapegoated immigrants, specifically non-white immigrants, and rationalized their marginalization or exclusion based on their perceived “un-American-ness.” Similarly, the inclusion of immigrants has been historically characterized by (and has depended on) their ability and willingness to contribute, to conform, and to strengthen the imagined national community.

In the forthcoming analysis chapters, I examine three examples of immigrant rights rhetoric that illustrate how undocumented immigrants and their allies challenge or reaffirm the discursive framework of the United States as a nation of immigrants. The

history outlined here provides the contextual background and the exigence for their rhetorical efforts. How do immigrant rights activists understand nationhood and citizenship? How does the myth of an immigrant nation work as an inventional resource for their rhetorics? How do they navigate the ever-present attitudes of xenophilia and xenophobia? Understanding and assessing the ways in which they engage these questions is ever so crucial in a cultural and political climate of immigrant demonization and exclusion. Perhaps the most important question that the following chapters seek to answer is: Can immigrant rights activists challenge and redefine existing cultural and political norms that (re)center whiteness as a condition of citizenship in the United States in ways that return the nation to Emma Lazarus' idealized vision of an immigrant nation?

Chapter 3: Border Angels, Migrant Life, and U.S. Border Enforcement

On July 23, 2017, San Antonio police discovered eight bodies in the back of an 18-wheeler in a Wal-Mart parking lot. The non-air-conditioned truck was transporting nearly 100 migrants from the border town of Laredo to San Antonio, Texas. Densely packed in the dark trailer, “sweating profusely in the rising oven-like heat,” with no water and with only a single hole to breathe through, children and adult migrants began to pass out.¹ The inhumane conditions in the truck claimed the lives of eight people during the trip from the border. Two more would die later in a local Texas hospital. Only days later, two women and two teenage children died trying to cross the Rio Grande in their efforts to reach the United States.²

These recent migrant deaths are, sadly, not a new development; instead they illustrate a decades-long trend of precarious and deadly crossings of the U.S.-Mexico border. Although the overall number of unauthorized border crossings has decreased to the lowest number in 40 years, large numbers of migrants continue to seek entry into the United States through its increasingly militarized border with Mexico.³ Many continue to lose their lives in their attempts.⁴ Official numbers from the U.S. Border Patrol indicate that between 200 and 500 people die trying to cross the border every year.⁵ The activist group Border Angels estimates that since the start of Operation Gatekeeper in 1994, over 10,000 people have lost their lives while trying to cross the border.⁶

In this chapter, I examine the rhetorical efforts of Enrique Morones, founder and director of Border Angels, to bring attention to migrant deaths at the U.S.-Mexico border and to promote a humane approach to U.S. immigration policy reform. Morones has been

an active advocate for migrant rights in the San Diego community for over two decades. Over the years, he has engaged in debates about illegal immigration on conservative talk shows, raising awareness and informing audiences about the real impacts of border enforcement on immigrant lives. The object of my analysis is his speech at the 2013 California Latino Legislative Caucus. A guest speaker at the event, Morones spoke to protest aspects of Senate Bill 744 (S.B. 744), also known as the Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act, which sought to increase policing of the U.S.-Mexico border and extend the existing border fence.

In my evaluation of Morones' rhetoric, I consider how he responds to the demands of the rhetorical situation. In this case, the rhetorical situation is affected by two compounding, but also conflicting, factors. First, Morones speaks in a cultural and political climate preoccupied with a need to establish border security and police the threat of the "illegal alien." At the same time, Morones speaks at a time when immigrant rights activism had gathered momentum and had made the subject of migrant lives a pressing matter across the partisan divide, sparking the possibility of passing a comprehensive immigration policy reform bill in U.S. Congress.

Enrique Morones' primary purpose is to reject the compromise embedded in S.B. 744 which offered a path to legalization to some at the cost of enhancing enforcement mechanisms and infrastructure at the U.S.-Mexico border. Morones presents the bill as a "guaranteed death sentence," showing how over the years the U.S. border enforcement regime has led to the unnecessary deaths of thousands of people.⁷ Unwilling to perpetuate this regime, Morones shares stories of migrant deaths in an attempt to humanize migrant border crossers, situating them within the "nation of immigrants" mythic framework. The

narratives of migrant deaths represent Morones' use of thanatopolitics to argue the need for humane immigration policy reform, as he simultaneously illustrates the intersection of sovereign power and biopower in U.S. immigration policy and border enforcement practices.⁸

Through my analysis of Morones' protest against S.B. 744 and his advocacy for humane immigration policy reform, I assess how he engages elements of the "capitalist" and "familial" iterations of the "nation of immigrants" myth to define the role and place of (im)migrant workers and their families in U.S. society.⁹ My analysis reveals that Morones promotes a xenophilic embrace of migrant workers who do not seek citizenship and instead only seek to support their families. However, his protest against S.B. 744 is grounded in a paradoxically conflicting approach to immigration and citizenship. On one hand, Morones uses allusion to present migrant workers and border crossers as consubstantial with the European immigrants celebrated by the "nation of immigrants" myth.¹⁰ On the other hand, Morones reifies the boundary between citizen and alien, suggesting that migrant workers and their families do not seek access to citizenship; instead he promotes their incremental and marginal inclusion in the U.S. polity through forms of documentation. These two conflicting positions in his speech create a paradox in which immigrants continue to be excluded from citizenship as the status marker that determines formal inclusion in the national community. Enrique Morones does not resolve the paradox; indeed, he complicates it through his advocacy for marginal inclusion through "documentation." His speech offers an important, if somewhat problematic, vision of a humane immigration policy reform that subverts legal-illegal binaries but also subjectifies the documented migrant worker as only differentially

included in the national body, reinforcing their outsider status. Morones protests the monopoly of the U.S. nation-state over the powers to determine the legitimate means of migration, and instead stresses movement as a human right.¹¹ But in the process, Morones does not critically disrupt these powers of the nation-state, instead presenting an image of the migrant as a “documented” partial member of the polity. In this “documented” position, the migrant does not threaten the institution of citizenship but, instead, occupies a parallel position that is nonetheless subordinate to that of the citizen. In the end, the marginal inclusion that Morones advocates positions the “documented” migrant worker and their families at the behest of the nation-state regime, where they can still be policed, controlled, and, potentially, removed.

For the purposes of analysis, I contextualize Morones’ speech as a response to what Nicholas De Genova calls the Border Spectacle, created by a regime of border enforcement and fence construction at the U.S.-Mexico border since 1994.¹² I expand the historical context overviewed in Chapter 2 by discussing how mechanisms of border enforcement gradually extended the state’s sovereign power to control its borders into the disciplinary power to surveil, control, and exclude certain immigrant bodies as “illegal.” This extension of state power ultimately comes to define the “biopolitics of immigration.”¹³ Using Judith Butler’s discussion of “life management” processes and the “grievability” of bodies, Joanna Zylińska defines the biopolitics of immigration as a dominant regime in which power determines “which bodies come to matter and why,” establishing the exclusion of bodies that do not belong, in order to define and protect the constitution of the *polis*, or the state.¹⁴ The border spectacle at the U.S.-Mexico border becomes a stage on which “numerous singular lives are being barred from the life of the

legitimate community, in which standards of recognition allow one access to the category of ‘the human.’”¹⁵ As such, the border becomes an object, both physical and figural, which materializes the state’s biopower to produce the status and subject position of the “illegal alien” and refuse to acknowledge their life and their efforts to survive.

In the following section, I discuss the insidious rhetorical function of border protection narratives and legislation, such as S.B. 744, to expand the powers of the U.S. nation-state to create and control the subject of the “illegal alien.”

The Border Spectacle and The Production of the “Illegal” Body

Conventionally understood, nation-states exercise sovereign power to determine their borders as a way to administer land, resources, and their position in the international order. Borders become the manifestation of sovereign power, concretizing the otherwise abstract concept of the nation-state. A line on a map, a river or an ocean, a welcome sign, or a wall in the desert, the border materializes in different ways but always marks difference between spaces and peoples. Alongside international regimes of documentation through passports and visas, borders and the mechanisms that demarcate and police these borders, define and control the legitimate and lawful means of migration from one nation to another.¹⁶ D. Robert DeChaine notes that the border is a “robust spatial metaphor” that is “invoked as a geographical term for delineating territories, a political expression of national sovereignty, a juridical marker of citizenship status, and an ideological trope for defining the terms of inclusion and exclusion.”¹⁷ Similarly, Kenneth Madsen observes that “the present US-Mexico border has defined the ultimate limits of sovereignty between these two countries since 1854.”¹⁸ As I discussed in Chapter 2, over a century and a half of border and immigration enforcement, the United

States has exercised its sovereign power to determine which immigrants to allow entry and which ones to exclude. But as Michel Foucault notes, in modern nation-states, such as the United States, sovereign powers are complemented by a spectrum of disciplinary powers. Disciplinary power allows the state to control bodies through mechanisms of surveillance. Foucault explains that “in modern societies, power is exercised through, on the basis of, and in the very play of the heterogeneity between a public right of sovereignty and a polymorphous mechanics of discipline.”¹⁹ That is to say, power is not reduced to a single modality, but instead operates between the limits of sovereignty and discipline. The U.S.-Mexico border illustrates the intersection of these powers. On one hand, the border is a physical marker of the state’s sovereign power to control access to its territory and resources. On the other hand, the border’s physical manifestation is also a mechanism, what Foucault called a *dispositif*, that arranges social relationships in society by demarcating citizens and aliens.²⁰ As a *dispositif*, the border becomes a disciplinary mechanism of state power that discursively creates the subject position of the “illegal alien,” as the one to be surveilled, controlled, and excluded.

Rhetoric scholars writing about immigration and the U.S.-Mexico border have illustrated this disciplinary power of the nation-state in their discussions of the discursive function of the border to criminalize the act of entering the United States without permission and to produce the political subject of the “illegal alien.”²¹ The physical presence of walls, barbed wire, security cameras, and patrol agents makes the border both visible and intelligible.²² Nicholas De Genova describes this landscape of disciplinary power as the Border Spectacle, or “a spectacle of enforcement at ‘the’ border, whereby migrant ‘illegality’ is rendered spectacularly visible.”²³ The border, therefore, becomes a

site where “immigration law’s pre-emptive and categorical stipulations of migrant ‘illegality’ tend to be reified as always-already established, immutable and unquestionable.”²⁴ The site of the border, and the spectacle that encircles it, set the scene to legitimate the exclusion of “illegal” bodies.²⁵

In the early 21st century, U.S. bordering practices enforce the disciplinary power of the state by marking difference and discursively positioning Latinx immigrants as “illegal,” excludable subjects. Kent Ono argues that “a border acts as a separator or divider of people with different social, economic, and political affiliations, as a signifier of inclusion and exclusion, and as a way of determining one’s worthiness as a living being.”²⁶ Because of its function as a disciplinary apparatus, the border dehumanizes people turning them into alien subjects. Contemporary U.S. border rhetorics (re)produce the status of alienage based on decades-old narratives of Mexicans-as-criminals. Dating back at least to the 1930s, U.S. border rhetorics relied on themes that equated “criminality with illegal entry.”²⁷ Rhetorically, the border, with its accompanying fence and surveillance technologies becomes an ideological barrier that protects the U.S. American nation from alien criminals.

To be sure, contemporary U.S. border logics and discourses continue to uphold the principles of national sovereignty, emphasizing the need to demarcate and protect national space from foreign threats. Henri Lefebvre explains this tendency to perceive and represent space as “a pre-existing void, endowed with formal properties alone,” and “a container waiting to be filled by a content – i.e., matter, or bodies.”²⁸ Rejecting such representations of material space, Lefebvre argues that “each living body *is* space and *has* its space: it produces itself in space and it also produces that space.”²⁹ In other words,

U.S. American geopolitical space is made intelligible through the rhetorical work of people who engage in border and national identity narratives. Such narratives simultaneously produce “American” space inhabited by “the American people.”³⁰ “American” bodies are (re)created through such rhetorical work, which has the flip-side of creating and disciplining the “non-American” body of the “illegal alien” on the outside, demarcated by the U.S.-Mexico border fence.

The border fence reinforces us-them, citizen-alien binaries because, as David Newman argues, “the stronger the barrier function of the border, the more powerful the imagined, the more abstract the narrative of what is perceived as lying on the other side.”³¹ Simply put, proposals to make the border fence longer, taller, or to electrify it, function rhetorically to proliferate the perceived cultural and ideological barriers between the U.S. and Mexico. Indeed, immigration policies, proposals, and rhetorics since 1994 have concentrated on the theme of border security in ways that not only naturalized and legitimated the material threshold between the U.S. and Mexico, but portrayed it as “the greatest source for *insecurity* in the national imaginary.”³²

As noted in Chapter 2, discourses about border security and Mexican migration predate the 1990s and have instead been grounded in long-standing official policies that positioned Latinx people not as immigrants, but as alien threats, “wetbacks,” and (at best) temporary migrant workers. Perceptions of a dangerously porous U.S.-Mexican border amplified in the latter half of the 20th century. The 1980s marked the start of the regime of border militarization, which Timothy Dunn describes as “the use of military rhetoric and ideology, as well as military tactics, strategy, technology, equipment, and forces” to police the U.S.-Mexico border.³³ Border militarization intensified in 1994 with Operation

Gatekeeper in California, which authorized the construction of a border fence and the deployment of surveillance technologies between San Diego and Tijuana. Similar programs were implemented in Texas, with Operation Blockade/Hold-the-Line, and in Arizona, with Operation Safeguard. Border fence construction and enforcement continued in the following decades and were further increased by 2005's Secure Border Initiative and 2006's Secure Fence Act (H.R. 6061).³⁴ The names of the policies reflect the themes of "safety" and "security" to rationalize and validate the protection of the geopolitical barrier between the United States and Mexico.

Such policies and their accompanying rhetorics broadly attach criminal status to migrant border crossers, automatically assuming them to be security threats. Consequently, the border as a material threshold erases and conflates different circumstances and individual characteristics of migrants into the vaguely broad image of the "illegal alien," whose body is made intelligibly different, racialized, and perceived as a threat to the U.S. nation.³⁵ Contemporary U.S. immigration policy perpetuates dominant perceptions that the U.S.-Mexico border is the only border that needs protection, and that Latinx bodies are ones to be controlled, surveilled, barred, or deported.³⁶ These policies and rhetorics allow the border to manifest both as a barrier in the desert, but also through various apparatuses designed to police subjects suspected to be "illegal aliens." These range from the college student starting a social media campaign to deport an undocumented student,³⁷ to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) conducting workplace raids³⁸ and stalking undocumented parents dropping off their children at school,³⁹ or arresting parents in a hospital while their infant awaits surgery,⁴⁰ to vigilante groups patrolling the U.S. border, hunting for "illegals."⁴¹ In essence, the border becomes

attached to the bodies of (im)migrants, particularly Latinx (im)migrants, who carry it “even when present at physical locations quite distant from the geopolitical border.”⁴²

Kent Ono concurs, arguing that “the border moves with migrants into those social spaces where they live: in the interior of the nation, their workplaces, and their homes.”⁴³

Enrique Morones illustrates this point in his speech, offering examples of the mistreatment and violence Latinx immigrants experience in the U.S., regardless of their immigration status or distance from the U.S.-Mexico border: “Luis Ramirez brutally beaten to death in Shenandoah, Pennsylvania, simply because he was Mexican and his wife was white. Marcello Lucero kicked to death when seven ‘good’ Americans wanted to have a ‘beaner boot party.’”⁴⁴ His examples illustrate the way U.S. politics and dominant rhetorics of immigration uphold racist stereotypes that legitimize the suspicion of the Latinx body as one that does not belong in the national community. In effect, Latinx bodies become the always-already suspect Other, the “illegal aliens” that carry the border with them, who need to be policed, and have the legitimacy of their presence constantly questioned.⁴⁵

This differential treatment of Latinx migrants and their bodies is the product of the ever-expanding powers of the nation-state over people as subjects. Border security narratives dehumanize “illegal aliens” as a security threat to the U.S. nation, no longer focusing on the need to discipline individual migrant bodies, but treating them as a population of illegal subjects. The state enforces its sovereign and disciplinary powers to determine which bodies to include or exclude from the national body. Marking people as “illegal” and as “aliens” allows the state to treat them differentially and often to deny them basic human rights. The state promotes and engages in border enforcement

practices that persecute suspect “illegal” bodies who can be denied due process; they can be jailed regardless of age, sex, gender, or health condition; and they can be left to die in the desert with no help or sympathy, due to their dehumanized status as “illegal aliens.” As a population, migrant bodies are reduced to simple mass, stripped of identity or human qualities. They can be deterred, imprisoned, shot, buried in mass unmarked graves, or forced to pass through more hostile terrain, where they can perish from heat exhaustion, hypothermia, or dehydration.⁴⁶ All the while, because they are not seen as individual human beings, the nation can absolve itself of culpability in the deaths of “illegal aliens.”

In August 2013, Enrique Morones appeared in front of California’s Legislative Latino Caucus to protest the proposed expansion of border enforcement mechanisms included in S.B. 744. In the next section, I discuss the ways in which S.B. 744 proposed to expand the sovereign and disciplinary powers of the nation-state over the lives of foreigners who seek to enter its borders.

S.B. 744 and the Border Enforcement Regime

In the spring of 2013, a bipartisan group of eight U.S. senators, later labeled the “Gang of Eight,” followed President Barack Obama’s call for immigration policy reform and drafted a Senate immigration bill, S.B. 744. Officially titled “Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act,” the bill was slated to address “all aspects of the immigration process from border and enforcement issues to legal immigration reforms.”⁴⁷ The founding principles of the bill were outlined in the drafters’ commitment to “secure the border, modernize and streamline our current legal immigration system, while creating a tough but fair legalization program for individuals

who are currently here.”⁴⁸ The bill passed the Senate with a majority vote of 68-32, and was then sent to the U.S. House of Representatives where it stalled and was never brought up for debate.

Despite its eventual failure, when it was first introduced, S.B. 744 created significant momentum for immigrant rights activism because it included a version of the DREAM Act which featured protections for undocumented immigrant youth brought without authorization to the United States by their parents. At the same time, the bill was received with criticism by some activists, like Enrique Morones, who argued that the bill was more in line with efforts to restrict immigration, failing to include the most vulnerable populations of undocumented immigrants and only making temporary provisions for a relatively privileged group of undocumented immigrants. In its essence, S.B. 744 followed the tendency of existing immigration policy to emphasize border security and expand mechanisms of surveillance and deterrence at the U.S.-Mexico border.

From its onset, S.B. 744 established that “the security of the border is a primary concern as part of a comprehensive strategy to ensure a functioning, fair, and effective immigration policy.”⁴⁹ It established a narrative of complete border enforcement as a governing apparatus and as a required condition for all other aspects of federal immigration policy. For example, even though S.B. 744 proposed a new Registered Provisional Immigrant (RPI) program for undocumented immigrants who met certain requirements, the text of the bill clarified that “before those in RPI status can apply to become lawful permanent residents the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) must certify that the Comprehensive Southern Border Security Strategy is deployed and

operational, 700 miles of fencing is complete, 38,405 border patrol agents are deployed, and the E-Verify employment verification system is in place.”⁵⁰ In other words, the reform promised by S.B. 744 was predicated on first achieving full control over border enforcement, however long it took, before any path to legal status or citizenship for undocumented immigrants could be established.

Driven by a perceived need to protect and secure U.S. borders, S.B. 744 echoed and responded to anti-immigrant discourses that articulated “the border crisis,” immigrants as “foreign threats,” the U.S. as a nation “under attack” with “our [sic] borders being invaded.”⁵¹ The bill proposed to increase control and enforcement measures by doubling the number of Border Patrol agents, extending the current border fence, and mandating 24-hour surveillance of the border regions. As such, the bill extended the reach and application of border control mechanisms mandated by U.S. immigration policy in previous decades. The text of the bill perpetuated a dominant regime of governmentality which requires that “the migrant/stranger must be regulated, surveilled, and potentially even excluded from the body politic for the threat it presents.”⁵² With its emphasis on strengthening border security, S.B. 744 validated perceptions of unauthorized border crossers as always/already criminals and dangerous “illegals” who needed to be monitored, policed, and deterred from entering U.S. national space.

To protest these aspects of S.B. 744, Enrique Morones appeared to testify in front of California’s Latino Legislative Caucus in August 2013. The caucus, originally established as a representative body in California’s state legislature in the early 1970s, has been at the center of the fight for Latinx political representation at all levels of

government.⁵³ In the 21st century, the caucus has continuously worked to promote “Federal comprehensive reform legislation that provides a pathway to citizenship” for the state’s 2.5 million undocumented immigrant residents.⁵⁴ The caucus has also supported the state legislation that enacted the California Dream Act of 2011 and the TRUST Act of 2014, both of which offered protections for undocumented immigrants living in the state of California. When Enrique Morones appeared in front of the caucus in August 2013, the group was debating whether to officially support S.B. 744. Speakers at the meeting laid out evidence and arguments in favor of the bill as a step in the right direction, one that would grant documented status to millions of immigrants. Enrique Morones delivered a speech in opposition of S.B. 744, presenting an argument for an incremental and humane immigration policy instead.

The Place of the Latinx Migrant in the “Nation of Immigrants” Mythology

With his testimony, Enrique Morones sought to move legislators to oppose S.B. 744, arguing that its emphasis on border enforcement would be a “guaranteed death sentence.”⁵⁵ Morones draws attention to the “deadly amendments” of the bill and speaks on behalf of migrant border crossers and families who do not qualify for relief under the proposed bill.⁵⁶ Arguing against the temptation of compromise, Morones instead proposes an incremental reform of immigration policy which would first focus on those in the most precarious situations and those who are already waiting in the system. In his protest, Morones contradicts President Barack Obama’s support for the bill as a measure that would accomplish comprehensive immigration reform. J. David Cisneros observes that Obama’s immigration discourse was characterized by the “logics of racial neoliberalism and neoliberal multiculturalism,” which reify deserving/undeserving

immigrant binaries and construct the ideal immigrant subject.⁵⁷ Cisneros adds that Obama's administration has been responsible for "one of the strictest enforcement regimes in decades, including record number of deportations, more Border Patrol personnel, heightened use of surveillance technologies, and increased fence construction."⁵⁸ Morones rejects the compromises of S.B. 744 and refuses to accept the proposed increases in border enforcement, arguing that they would cause more migrant deaths. He calls on California's Legislative Latino Caucus to "stand up to this injustice of the additional wall, of the additional Border Patrol," and instead to insist on an incremental and humane approach to policy reform.⁵⁹

Promoting a humane approach to immigration policy reform, Morones' first rhetorical intervention is to humanize migrant border crossers. To do so, Morones discursively moves them away from their dominant image as "illegals," and instead presents them as people of similar circumstances to those of immigrants celebrated by the myth of the United States as a nation of immigrants. As a voice of opposition to the official policy proposal of Obama's administration, Morones speaks as an activist who has organized marches and as someone who is on the "front lines": "I'm out there, I pick up the dead bodies. I talk to the women whose sons are lost in the desert, and sometimes we find them and it's too late. I'm with these families."⁶⁰ Presenting himself as an advocate and a voice for a population that has been rendered voiceless, Morones uses allusion to draw a parallel between the fight for immigrant rights and the Civil Rights movement of the 1960. Invoking the memory of Martin Luther King and the 1963 March on Washington, Morones creates a parallel between the "dreams" of the two groups to be treated equally as human beings in U.S. society. Morones further alludes to the ethos of

the Civil Rights movement in his protest against the compromises of S.B. 744, exclaiming: “When our African-American brothers and sisters, 50 years ago, marched on Washington, they weren’t saying ‘Okay, we are going to give you the right to vote, but you have to sacrifice 300 people every year.’ They would have said no!”⁶¹ Through such allusions, Morones appeals to establish consubstantiality across time and culture, reminding his audience that “when millions of us marched in the immigrant spring of 2006 nobody was marching for more immigration gatekeeping.”⁶² Such historical allusions and references bring legitimacy to Morones’ advocacy, situating it within the broader frameworks of civil rights and immigrant rights activism.

By establishing a parallel between the two types of activism, Morones bridges the citizen-alien divide, stressing the informal markers of citizenship which draw attention to citizenship as a modality.⁶³ In the process, Morones deploys the strategies of consubstantiality and contrast. Rhetorically, Morones incorporates stories that promote consubstantiality between immigrants of different circumstances and from different cultures throughout the history of U.S. immigration. Specifically, he positions migrant border crossers within the “capitalist” and “familial” iterations of the myth of an immigrant nation.⁶⁴ Morones compares the contemporary Latin American immigrant, who is “crossing the border right now, simply because he wants to feed his family, wants to be with his loved one, wants to be able to have an opportunity, because he is being prosecuted, because of the violence, because of the drug war,” to the Northern European forefathers of U.S. citizens who “came through Ellis Island” to escape “the potato famine or religious prosecution going on in Europe.”⁶⁵ The parallel illustrates the similarity of circumstances between immigrants across space, time, and cultures. It places the migrant

border crosser within the xenophilic embrace of the “capitalist” immigrant who seeks work and wants to contribute and of the “familial” immigrant who values and upholds traditional family roles. Rhetorically, Morones urges his listeners not simply to identify with the struggles of migrant border crossers, but also to realize their consubstantiality with them, as the descendants of the nation’s mythically celebrated European immigrants; to realize that they are “both joined and separate, at once a distinct substance and consubstantial with another” in the myth of a “nation of immigrants.”⁶⁶

His second strategy, however, creates a contrast that illustrates the displacement of contemporary migrant border crossers from the “nation of immigrants” framework. Complementing the strategy of consubstantiality, Morones sheds light on the fact that the Ellis Island narrative embedded in the “nation of immigrants” myth, for the most part, has obscured and excluded the immigrant experiences of people from Mexico and South America. Morones explains that these immigrants never experienced a Golden Gate, but instead experienced a gatekeeper: “There is no Statue of Liberty for them, no ‘give me your poor, tired, huddled masses...’ they have a wall.”⁶⁷ Once again hinting at their “capitalist” and “familial” circumstances as people seeking better economic opportunities and seeking to reunite with family in the United States, Morones illustrates the difference in economic circumstances between Latinx immigrants and immigrants from Europe and, peculiarly, Asia. Speaking about them as visa overstayers, Morones explains:

They are not from Latin America – they are from Asia, Europe, people with money. Student, work, and tourist visas, and their visas expired, and they stayed. They are undocumented. The other 60% are the people crossing in the desert, like the five people that died two days ago on the train from Southern Mexico to Northern Mexico.⁶⁸

Discursively establishing a contrast between the circumstances of immigrants, Morones draws attention to the relative privilege of undocumented immigrants from Europe and Asia as people with money and as people who did not experience the militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border and risk their lives trying to cross it.

Morones further sharpens the contrast by discussing the different driving forces behind the original migration of people from Europe and the contemporary migration of people from Latin America. Unlike immigrants from Northern Europe, who chose to immigrate to the United States to escape “the potato famine or religious prosecution going on in Europe,” Morones argues that immigrants from Latin America are driven to migrate due to U.S. involvement in their home countries: “whether it was Reagan’s intervention in Central America, whether it was the free trade agreements, whether it was the United States with 4% of the world’s population demanding more than half of the world’s illegal drugs, consuming more than a third of the world’s natural resources...”⁶⁹ Through his critique of U.S. foreign policy, Morones demonstrates the culpability of the United States in creating its problem of illegal immigration. This infuses an aura of responsibility to welcome and include immigrants who were displaced from their homes because of the actions of the United States.

The complementing strategies of consubstantiality and contrast seek to humanize migrant border crossers and to show how their subjectivity is informed by intersecting and competing histories of U.S. immigration. The two strategies position the Latinx migrant body as both inside the “nation of immigrants” framework, because of the nation’s promise to welcome the huddled masses; and as outside the mythic framework, as U.S. immigration laws and foreign policies historically upheld borders that positioned

the Latinx body as different and excludable. Morones therefore grounds his call for immigration policy reform as a responsibility of the United States to recognize and include migrant border crossers because of its alleged commitment to welcome immigrants in need and because of its role in displacing them from their home countries.

Balancing contrast and consubstantiality, Morones appeals to his audience to support a humane immigration policy reform that would treat all immigrants equally as human beings. To illustrate his point about the need for a humane immigration policy reform, Enrique Morones engages in thanatopolitics by sharing the stories of migrants who lost their lives as they attempted to cross into the United States. Thanatopolitics, or the politics of death, for Stuart Murray, represents a strategy of rethinking and responding to biopolitics and the biopower of the nation-state.”⁷⁰ Stuart Murray argues that thanatopolitics is a rejoinder to biopolitics because it recognizes the rhetorical agency of death, allowing the dead to “speak” or allowing the living to make rhetorical statements by memorializing those who have passed. In this case study, Enrique Morones speaks on behalf of the dead while simultaneously using their deaths to make a political statement about migrant life.

Even after their deaths, these migrants serve a political purpose in Morones’ speech, who uses their stories to illustrate the peculiar position of Latinx (im)migrants with regard to “capitalist” and “familial” frameworks of the myth of a “nation of immigrants.” First, Morones shares the story of Marco Antonio Villasenor and his father who were traveling to the United States to seek work. Both lost their lives in the back of a semi-truck in Texas in 2003, in an incident similar to the 2017 tragedy at the beginning of this chapter. Morones retells the story, adding dramatic development, portraying the

dehydrated Marco asking his father and seventeen other men for water that they wouldn't give to him because they had already died in the back of the truck trailer. Next, Morones tells the story of Lucretia and her son Jesus who were trying to cross the U.S.-Mexico border to reunite with their husband and father, who was already in the United States. Morones shares the tragedy in which, "Lucretia, after her smuggler abandoned her, literally dies in the arms of Jesus, her fifteen-year-old son Jesus."⁷¹ Morones' third and final story is that of Guadalupe Bertran, an undocumented immigrant who traveled back to Mexico to bury her mother. She tried crossing back into the United States, using a smuggler, but died in the desert, "leaving behind four orphan children."⁷² The three stories intertwine the "capitalist" and "familial" iterations of the "nation of immigrants" myth. They show how the regime of U.S. border enforcement largely ignores the xenophilic embrace of immigrants as hard workers and contributors ("capitalist" iteration) or as people who reinforce the nation's traditional family norms ("familial" iteration). Instead, it targets Latinx border crossers through the xenophobic perception of them as outsiders to the nation, as threats to the U.S. economy and to the normatively white U.S. American family.

The stories also help carve out space for migrant border crossers in the mythic framework of the United States as a nation of immigrants. But even as Morones manages to humanize migrant border crossers and to reclaim their place among other immigrants, he nevertheless reifies the citizen-alien divide, claiming that migrants "are not looking for citizenship," and instead simply "want to have a way in which they can come out of the shadows and feed their families."⁷³ As such, he protests the biopolitical regime of U.S. immigration which renders migrant life illegitimate, ignoring the deaths of migrant

border crossers, ignoring violence against immigrants in the United States, and effectively forcing immigrants to exist in the “shadows” of the public sphere. Appealing to the xenophilic embrace of immigrants embedded in the “capitalist” and “familial” iterations of the myth of an immigrant nation, Morones presents the migrant worker as the ideal, docile, foreigner who does not seek to disrupt the nation’s norms of citizenship and is content to be differentially included (as documented) and allowed to provide for his family.

Even as he explicitly states that migrants do not seek access to citizenship, Morones nevertheless positions them as participants in the U.S. public sphere who engage it in ways that signal the performative elements (public deliberation and civic engagement) of citizenship. His rhetoric presents migrant workers and their families as people who work and live in the United States, but remain culturally and legally separated from U.S. citizens. His description signals to a variation on the concept of “cultural citizenship” with its key aspect being “the struggle for a distinct social space in which members of the marginalized group are free to express themselves and feel at home.”⁷⁴ Renato Rosaldo explains that cultural citizenship is “the right to be different (in terms of race, ethnicity, or native language) with respect to the norms of the dominant national community, without compromising one’s right to belong, in the sense of participating in the nation-state’s democratic processes.”⁷⁵ Morones violates the second half of this definition with his insistence that migrants and their families are “not looking for citizenship.”⁷⁶ In his words, migrants remain outside the institution of citizenship as individuals who do not establish or claim a sense of belonging.⁷⁷ This form of “non-belonging” celebrates diversity, rejecting the need for cultural assimilation, or even the

legal equivalency between citizen and immigrant. Morones explains, “we are not looking for legalization...There is no human being that is illegal. We are looking for documentation.”⁷⁸ Promoting “documentation” instead of legalization or citizenship, Morones creates an immigrant subjectivity that maintains the differential and marginal inclusion of migrant workers and their families in the polity. E. Johanna Hartelius explains that to be “documented” means inclusion into a bureaucratic legal order as a subject position to be controlled, surveilled, and policed.⁷⁹ As such, Morones’ rhetoric problematically reifies regimes of control and surveillance, even as he protests border enforcement and militarization practices.

His promotion of limited inclusion through “documentation” creates another paradox. Even as this limited inclusion upholds the principles and values of the “capitalist” and “familial” iterations of the “nation of immigrants” myth, it simultaneously poses a threat to the norms of the “communitarian” iteration of the “nation of immigrants” myth. Because they assert that they do not seek a path to citizenship but at the same time insist on their economic and familial inclusion in U.S. polity, migrant workers and their families threaten the communal standards of the nation through their refusal to assimilate, establishing their own cultural and social enclaves. In those enclaves, they continue to be perceived as “non-belonging” members of the U.S. polity who do not participate or contribute to the politics of the nation’s imagined community. Indeed, Morones’ advocacy does not challenge the norms of citizenship and belonging and instead envisions a two-tiered society in which immigrants are treated humanely and allowed to live outside of the “shadows,” but, nonetheless, continue to occupy a sociopolitical position inferior to that of citizens. In a way, his vision of

incremental and humane immigration policy reflects the segregationist politics of the “separate but equal doctrine,” at the same time that it reactivates aspects of the dominant “Latino threat narrative.”⁸⁰ Morones’ advocacy for incremental inclusion problematically promotes a two-tiered system in which “documented” migrant families are permitted basic human rights and freedoms, but remain excluded from the full rights of U.S citizenship and full membership in the national polity.

Despite its problematic promotion of “documentation,” Morones’ advocacy is nevertheless significant as it protests the biopolitical regime of immigration which renders migrant life illegitimate. As such, Morones’ rhetoric is an effort to ameliorate and reduce the scope of biopolitics on migrant lives. Even though a “documented” status still renders immigrants as controllable and excludable subjects, it offers an escape from the status of the “illegal alien,” as the political subject whose death in the desert can be ignored or justified as collateral damage in the pursuit of border security.

Preventing Migrant Deaths, Protesting Border Mechanisms

The stories of people who lost their lives while trying to cross the U.S.-Mexico border function rhetorically as exigence for Morones’ protest against the proposed expansion of state power over the lives of immigrants through border militarization practices. The narratives of migrant deaths are a contrast to the official position of the U.S. nation-state which presents border enforcement as legitimate and necessary to curb the threat of “illegal aliens.” Instead, Morones shifts the narrative from one in which security is a necessity, to one in which security is the cause of migrant deaths. By sharing the individual stories of migrant crossers, Morones humanizes the topic, and sheds light on the deaths caused by the militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border since 1994. His

message contrasts the impersonal approach that characterizes immigration policy and enforcement with a rhetoric that legitimizes the lives of migrants, not as political subjects, but as human beings first and foremost. The stories effectively foreground his call for humane immigration policy reform.

Engaging in thanatopolitics, Morones uses the three stories to vividly represent the ten thousand migrant deaths since the construction of the border wall between San Diego and Tijuana in 1994. Their stories illustrate his point that “what happened in 1994 with Operation Gatekeeper, that has been a death sentence.”⁸¹ Furthermore, the stories of migrant deaths establish exigence for his challenge of S.B. 744’s proposed increases in border security measures. The imagery of “death” permeates Morones’ description of the bill, which he argues would be “committing people to a death sentence.”⁸² He calls the proposed additions to the Border Patrol and the increases in border fence construction “deadly amendments.” Morones protests the militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border, specifically the border fence and the increases in Border Patrol officers, on the grounds that it has caused the unnecessary deaths of migrants in the desert. Morones cautions his audience that “if you double the wall from 700 miles to 1,400, which is what they propose, it’s a 2,000 mile border, you are going to have more deaths.”⁸³ He rhetorically asks his audience, “ten thousand people is not enough?”⁸⁴ Mourning their deaths, Morones challenges the tendency of official policy discourse to dehumanize migrant border crossers; instead, Morones notes that “all of these people, whether they are from Zacatecas or wherever...Zimbabwe, they are human beings.”⁸⁵ Finally, he puts a human face to the commonly ignored migrant deaths, reflecting back on the examples he shared earlier: “If you double the Border Patrol from 20,000 to 40,000 you are going to have

more Anastacio Hernandez's, Sergio Hernandez's, Marco Antonio Villasenor's...more people that are killed by Border Patrol."⁸⁶ Interesting here is his use of the phrase "killed by Border Patrol." There are, indeed, cases in which Border Patrol agents have killed migrant border crossers. From 2010 to 2015 alone, the U.S. Border Patrol shot and killed 33 people.⁸⁷ However, Morones' stories illustrate that migrants like Marco and his father didn't die because of the state's explicit decision to kill them; instead, they died in the trailer of a truck while trying to avoid the various border enforcement mechanisms of the state.

Enrique Morones' major rhetorical intervention occurs at the intersection of the contrasting narratives of "migrant deaths" and "national security." Without explicitly rejecting the logics of nationhood, national security, and citizenship, Morones exposes the insidious decision of the state to close its eyes to migrant deaths and ignore the lives of migrant crossers as illegitimate, all in the name of legitimating the sovereign right of a nation to protect its borders. His testimony functions rhetorically as protest against the way in which the U.S. border enforcement regime, and S.B. 744's proposed expansions of it, exert biopower to regulate life and death for entire populations of people as "illegal aliens."

Enrique Morones' rhetoric reveals an approach toward a humane immigration policy that treats migrant life as the determining factor in immigration politics. However, the history of U.S. immigration policy reveals the state's position that *the object* of immigration politics is migrant life. Simply put, the U.S. nation-state implements immigration policy and enforces its borders as a way to regulate migrant life in relation to the nation. Michel Foucault distinguishes this power from disciplinary state powers

which “rule a multiplicity of men to the extent that their multiplicity can and must be dissolved into individual bodies that can be kept under surveillance, trained, used, and, if need be, punished.”⁸⁸ Instead, biopower takes disciplinary power a step further by establishing control over people not as bodies, but as species.⁸⁹ In this case, the species is the Latinx foreigner, discursively reimagined as the “illegal alien,” who is manifest in both individual bodies but also as a general population of people who threaten the U.S. nation. For Foucault, “biopolitics deals with the population, with the population as political problem, as a problem that is at once scientific and political, as a biological problem and as power’s problem.”⁹⁰ As previously discussed, immigration rhetorics over time helped establish an image of Latinx immigrant bodies as always-already outside the nation, making them a population to be controlled and excluded. Xenophobically seen as a foreign population separated by a border fence, their lives are unintelligible in the context of the U.S. nation.

In his speech, Enrique Morones describes S.B. 744’s proposed expansion of the U.S. border enforcement regime as a “guaranteed death sentence.”⁹¹ It is within the context of biopolitics that we begin to understand how the nation-state exerts power over the life and death of foreign populations under the veil of sovereignty and through seemingly innocuous narratives of border security. Foucault explains that in this iteration “power is decreasingly the power of the right to take life, and increasingly the right to intervene to make live.”⁹² Through the allegedly passive defense apparatus of the border fence, the state no longer *acts* to take the life of a migrant border crosser; instead, the state has the power to act and *allow* the migrant border crosser to live.⁹³ The intersection of sovereign and disciplinary power with biopower creates the regime of biopolitics in

which the nation-state determines which populations to ignore and leave to die in the desert, and which populations to legitimize and allow to live. Stuart Murray explains that in the regime of biopolitics “nobody is killed, at least not directly, and nobody’s hands are bloodied, at least not that we can see...deaths are never ‘caused’ as such; officially, they are merely ‘allowed,’ a passive event, collateral damage.”⁹⁴

In this regime of biopolitics, the U.S. nation-state enforces its border and immigration policies through the apparatus of the U.S.-Mexico border fence to deter migrants from entering or to force them to cross through more dangerous parts of the desert. Seen as a passive measure of defense, the border fence allows the state to absolve itself of responsibility in causing migrant deaths in the desert, even though it was the state that built the border fence that made them pass through the desert. Agency becomes displaced in these acts of killing so that the U.S. nation-state is not perceived as killing or causing the death of migrant border crossers through its border enforcement mechanisms; instead, it is the border crossers who choose to break the law and potentially lose their lives.

Enrique Morones protests the state’s exercise of sovereign and disciplinary power to deport/exclude/imprison individual undocumented immigrants (*take life*). At the same time, through the individual stories of migrant deaths, Morones uses thanatopolitics to protest the state’s exercise of biopower through border enforcement mechanisms, such as the U.S.-Mexico border fence, that refuse to acknowledge the lives of people who attempt to cross the state’s border and lose their lives in the process. Ultimately, Morones illustrates the breadth of state powers to discipline and take the lives of individual migrants, but also to create and let an entire population of “illegal aliens” die in the

desert. Subjectivized and dehumanized by the biopolitical, disciplinary and sovereign powers of the state, the migrant border crosser becomes *homo sacer*, as someone who can be left to die in the desert without placing blame on the state.⁹⁵ Within this regime of biopolitics, the U.S. border enforcement regime and the mechanism of the border fence have no agency or control over the deaths of individual migrants, but they have the ability to control the mortality of migrants as a population whose access to life can be deterred.⁹⁶ And ultimately, through the mechanism of the border, the U.S. state absolves itself of culpability in migrant deaths, because in biopolitics “power no longer recognizes death. Power literally ignores death.”⁹⁷ Morones brings attention to death, seeking to establish the culpability and interest of the nation-state to allow populations of migrants to die in the desert. Challenging dominant narratives about the need for border security, Morones protests the proposed increases in border security infrastructure by making appeals to recognize the deaths of Latinx migrants as “grievable” and as the unjust result of the biopolitics of an immigration regime that excludes Latinx bodies as a population of “illegal aliens” who do not belong in the mythic “nation of immigrants.”

Conclusion

With his testimony in front of California’s Latino Legislative Caucus in 2013, Enrique Morones protests the comprehensive immigration reform bill introduced in the U.S. Senate. Morones uses allusion to invite his listeners to realize a sense of consubstantiality between themselves as descendants of immigrants and present-day migrant border crossers. In addition to inviting consubstantiality, the allusions establish a contrast between the experiences of immigrants from Europe and Latinx migrants. Through these two rhetorical strategies, the Latinx migrant becomes situated as both

inside and outside the mythic framework of the United States as a “nation of immigrants.” Furthermore, Morones attempts to subvert the legal-illegal binary that dominates modern narratives of U.S. immigration, presenting instead a compelling counter-narrative of migrants as human beings. This becomes the centerpiece of his push for a humane immigration policy reform.

On one hand, his advocacy offers an escape from the dehumanizing rhetoric of official narratives of state sovereignty that emphasize the need for border security and enforcement. On the other hand, it fails to establish a meaningful position for immigrants in the U.S. polity. By rejecting the compromise of increasing border security, Morones pleads for documentation, which he differentiates from legalization and citizenship. The resulting subject position of the documented immigrant allows one to work and provide for their family without putting their life at risk in the desert and without the fear of being deported. In that position, the “documented” migrant is never fully included in the national body and is, instead, seen as a perpetual foreigner whose presence is regulated and allowed for as long as it benefits the U.S. economy and for as long as it does not pose a threat to the nation-state’s institution of citizenship.

Indeed, in the context of citizenship, Morones presents a conflicting image of the “documented” migrant which validates the norms of formal citizenship and the nation-state’s sovereign power to control access to it as an institution. Morones promotes incremental immigration policy reform which has severe limitations as it stops short of outlining a path to meaningful and lasting inclusion into the body polity. Appealing for only partial inclusion through documentation, Morones does not speak on behalf of all immigrants, but instead serves as a voice for arguably the most vulnerable immigrant

population consisting of people who attempt to cross the heavily patrolled U.S.-Mexico border. His rhetoric shows the need to recognize the precariousness of migrant life, and the death toll that results from border security initiatives such as S.B. 744. Advocating for a humane approach to an incremental immigration policy reform, Morones validates the “documented” subject position, which allows the state to control and surveil populations of immigrants.⁹⁸ Morones does not problematize or question the concept of formal citizenship, as he focuses on securing basic human rights to migrants who attempt to cross the U.S.-Mexico border. Characterized by the demand for documentation, his proposed humane immigration policy reform maintains the limited and differential inclusion of the “documented” immigrant as a social and political subject in the U.S. public sphere and legal order.

In the end, Enrique Morones offers an important, but deeply flawed, intervention into the dominant discursive regime around U.S. citizenship and immigration. He brings attention to the unjust and unnecessary deaths of migrant border crossers, carving out discursive space for them in the mythic framework of the United States as a “nation of immigrants.” But his efforts to challenge dominant perceptions of Latinx bodies as ones outside the imagined U.S. national community are hampered by his advocacy for partial inclusion through documentation. The subject position of the “documented” migrant who does not seek access to citizenship is in opposition to Morones’ earlier attempts to establish consubstantiality between generations of immigrants. Even though the prototypical and mythic immigrants from Northern Europe sought to provide for their families and escape violence and prosecution in their home countries, they also sought their full inclusion into the United States as their new home, gradually assimilating into

their new communities while also maintaining their cultural heritage. Morones' appeal for incremental inclusion through documentation is a double-edged sword, simultaneously positioning the migrant border crosser as someone who does not threaten the institution of U.S. citizenship but, at the same time, as someone who threatens the "communitarian" iteration of the "nation of immigrants" myth. As such, Morones incidentally reinforces the dominant "Latino threat narrative," which is sustained through assumptions that Latinx people do not intend to integrate into the United States.⁹⁹

Throughout the speech, Morones pleads with the members of the caucus in a way that signals an attempt to make the audience comfortable through bargaining and offering the compromise of incremental inclusion through "documentation." Morones represents the interests of specific portions of the undocumented immigrant population, making more palatable their inclusion into the imagined community of the "nation of immigrants." In doing so, he does not challenge the broader logics of the U.S. immigration regime or the logics that underpin the "nation of immigrants" framework that uphold figural borders of exclusion.

However, Enrique Morones offers an important and productive rethinking of the material border between the United States and Mexico. Protesting the expansion of border control mechanisms, Morones reconceptualizes the material place of the border as the space of borderlands, which Gloria Anzaldúa defines as both a physical and figural space where "two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy."¹⁰⁰ Morones' advocacy for a humane approach toward an incremental immigration policy reform seeks to erase legal-

illegal binaries, to reject the notion of the border as a physical boundary that demarcates the limits of national sovereignty and space, and to transform the U.S. nation-state into a metaphorical borderland that invites people of different races, cultures, and economic status to cohabitate without fear of prosecution, deportation, or dying in the desert.

Chapter 4: DREAMer Empowerment: Immigrant Women and the Enactment of Cultural
Citizenship

In the early years of the 21st century, the word DREAMer began to appear in U.S. media. The label was adopted by young undocumented immigrants who, in their support for the DREAM Act, began to identify themselves as DREAMers. The DREAM Act is an acronym for Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors, a bill introduced in the U.S Senate in 2001 that proposed to grant legal status and conditional residency to certain undocumented immigrants in the United States. By the year 2000, more than one million children and young adults had “migrated to the United States without authorization” and had grown up in the country without legal status.¹ The DREAM Act outlined a much-needed and long-awaited path to citizenship for undocumented children who were brought to the United States before the age of 16 by their parents. Lisa Marie Cacho observes that with “each year that the DREAM Act fails to get through Congress, the promise of citizenship is foreclosed to countless young adults, producing a highly educated population of people we might consider ‘undocumented Americans.’”² Cacho adds that this growing population of “undocumented Americans” is relegated to the realm of “social death,” as they are forced to live in the shadows under the constant threat of exclusion and deportation. In the realm of social death, undocumented immigrants experience different forms of exclusion daily, from an inability to obtain a driver’s license or open a bank account, to fears of going out in public, including travel, attending college, or starting a career.³

As the DREAM Act failed repeatedly to be enacted by Congress, young undocumented immigrants began to organize as they attempted to escape the realm of

social death. In the early stages of organizing, immigrant youth participated in broad legislative efforts toward immigration policy reform. Over time and with the 2007 failure to pass comprehensive immigration reform, immigrant youth began to break away from what Walter Nicholls describes as the “non-profit industrial complex” to find new ways to organize themselves in support of the DREAM Act.⁴ In 2008, the organization United We Dream sought to establish a national support structure for youth activism and protection from deportation. In time, United We Dream inspired numerous affiliates, local chapters, and sister organizations of young people who started to emerge out of the shadows of their “illegal” status.⁵ Cacho observes that “when engaged in acts of civil disobedience, these activists publicly disclose their undocumented status, unsettling witnesses’ perceptions of and prejudices about undocumented immigrants.”⁶ By 2012, the terms undocumented youth and the DREAMers had become synonymous.

The DREAMers arguably are the best known and most vocal group in the broader population of undocumented immigrants in the United States. They stand apart from the migrant border crossers represented by Enrique Morones in Chapter 3 due to their integration and relative assimilation into the U.S. public sphere. Many of them were brought across the border by their parents, when they were too young to remember the experience of facing the apparatus of U.S. border enforcement. Instead, many DREAMers speak of their experiences growing up in the United States as cultural insiders and as members of society. Their rhetoric also departs from Enrique Morones’ advocacy for documentation and partial inclusion, as they make demands for their full integration into U.S. society. In this chapter, I seek to examine if and how their demands

for inclusion activate the logics of citizenship through their different engagements with the myths of the “American Dream” and the United States as a “nation of immigrants.”

Over the last two decades, scholars in numerous fields have started to examine the emerging activism of undocumented immigrant youth. In the field of communication and rhetorical studies, Claudia Anguiano and Karma Chávez argue that the vernacular rhetoric of Latinx immigrant youth often naturalizes the “American Dream” myth, manifested in their double identities as both DREAMers and Americans.⁷ For them, this evidences “the limits of cultural citizenship as an agentic resource for those without legal citizenship.”⁸ Megan Morrissey similarly criticizes the tendency of DREAMer rhetoric to appeal to conventional changes that do not challenge the established norms of citizenship, arguing that: “Using vernacular discourse to unfix the category of citizenship from the exclusive mantel of white heterosexuality upon which it rests, migrant youth do not devalue the system of citizenship itself.”⁹ Similarly, Beth Baker-Cristales argues that despite their use of vernacular protest rhetorics, undocumented immigrants often uphold the dominant neoliberal characteristics of the very discourse they oppose.¹⁰ Tania Unzueta Carrasco and Hinda Seif applaud the shift toward self-organizing since 2010, but also acknowledge the persistent inclination of DREAMers to appeal to the general public and their expectations.¹¹ Finally, E. Johanna Hartelius critiques the tendency of DREAMers to conform to a bureaucratic order through their demands for documentation, challenging the political and rhetorical efficacy of the “undocumented” subjectivity which reifies the powers of the nation-state to control and surveil the immigrant subject.¹²

I join these scholarly criticisms of the rhetoric of undocumented immigrant youth in an effort to better understand the dynamics of immigrant self-organizing and to assess

how DREAMers define inclusion and belonging in relation to the U.S. nation-state. I analyze three speeches of undocumented immigrant youth, revealing different perceptions of belonging and enactments of citizenship that reflect different iterations of the “nation of immigrants” and “American Dream” myths that ultimately complicate the concepts of formal and cultural citizenship.¹³ My analysis has three parts. First, I discuss how Cristina Jiménez carves out discursive space for DREAMer rhetorics, incorporating elements of a feminine rhetorical style as she shares her own story, presenting it as a model for empowering immigrant youth. Second, I examine Leezia Dhalla’s embrace of the American Dream and her embodiment of U.S. cultural citizenship, presenting herself through the popular narrative themes of DREAMers as innocent, achieving, and assimilated immigrants.¹⁴ Her speech illustrates Anguiano and Chávez’s observations about DREAMer rhetoric’s tendency to reify the logics of the “American Dream” myth, but it also establishes a contextual contrast to Rossy Evelyn Lima’s speech. In the final analytical section, I assess how Lima embraces a cosmopolitan approach to cultural citizenship, which separates it from the norms of the American Dream and creates a bridge to a more nuanced understanding of citizenship; one that isn’t tied to the nation-state or its dominant culture.

The analysis of their speeches illustrates and supports scholarly arguments that vernacular rhetorics of protest don’t always resist the dominant logics of citizenship.¹⁵ I interrogate how these women define their place in the U.S. public sphere, establishing their immigrant identity as both DREAMers and cultural U.S. Americans. All three women use the language and imagery of a “dream” to define their sense of belonging and to support their claims for inclusion. They speak in the aftermath of the introduction of

the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program by President Obama's administration, and as such, they frame their narratives to emphasize the effect of the program on the lives of undocumented youth.¹⁶

Furthermore, the three women speak in the cultural landscape of 21st century United States, where women's position and status in society continues to be policed by a predominantly white male political elite that dictates the norms and standards of political, discursive, and rhetorical action. Lack of formal citizenship further complicates the ability of undocumented immigrant women to pursue inclusion in a cultural, legal, and sociopolitical landscape that invalidates their discourse and labels their personhood as "illegal." The slippage between citizens and aliens as subjects of the nation-state complicates the rhetorical context, creating a set of distinctive challenges for undocumented immigrant women. From their marginalized position, undocumented immigrant women protest a normative legal order that treats them unequally both as women and as non-citizen subjects. Each of the speeches relies on the personal narrative style, which has become a powerful rhetorical tool in protest discourses.¹⁷

As I show in this chapter, Jiménez, Dhalla, and Lima adopt elements of the feminine rhetorical style in their narratives, as they seek to raise consciousness and advocate their inclusion into the social, political, and rhetorical landscape of the United States. Their speech is grounded in the generic characteristics of the feminine style which "enacts nurturing, promotes empowerment, and facilitates experiential reasoning."¹⁸ In their rhetorics of protest, Jiménez, Dhalla, and Lima seek "to alter society and to undermine premises in the dominant ideology," which requires them to depart from the expectations of U.S. audiences, "to create dissonance among deeply held values, to jolt

listeners out of complacency.”¹⁹ I examine if and how elements of the feminine rhetorical style can be used alongside the strategies of identification and disidentification. To establish belonging, one ostensibly has to show similarity, not difference. The chapter examines how undocumented immigrant women navigate this contradiction, recognizing that their very act of speaking challenges the norms of citizenship and political discourse.

Shifting attention away from citizenship as a status attribute, the three women exhibit different modes of being, acting, and belonging in the landscape of cultural citizenship. Specifically, this chapter enters into conversation with Yazmin Lazcano-Pry’s argument that undocumented immigrant youth “position themselves at the center of immigration discourse,” recasting citizenship “from a set of legal stipulations (where government has the upper hand) to a rhetorical achievement (where everyday people set the terms of the debate).”²⁰ Even as the notion of citizenship as a rhetorical achievement offers a productive, if somewhat theoretical alternative, Emily Ironside and Lisa Corrigan point out that despite “access to public debate on the rhetorical concept of citizenship and despite the opportunity to revise the American identity to include multiracial and multinational characteristics, DREAM Act activists adopt the dominant markers of an exclusionary nationalist American identity,” and thus employ “an ineffective constitutive rhetoric that ensures the continued marginalization of these immigrants from the national narrative.”²¹ The chapter extends their argument, taking into account Claudia Anguiano and Karma Chávez’s similar observation that DREAMers often “protest their exclusions from actualizing their American Dream as the legal limits of citizenship pose a barrier at every turn at the same time that they uphold the myth of the American Dream.”²² Furthermore, I extend Megan Morrissey’s argument that even disidentification strategies

used by DREAMers “do not critically challenge or deconstruct traditional valuations and/or understandings of citizenship.”²³ Intersecting the arguments of these scholars, I examine the inability of some DREAMer rhetorics to escape the logics underpinning the “nation of immigrants” mythic framework as they embrace U.S. American cultural citizenship.²⁴ Despite their flaws and limitations, I argue that contemporary DREAMer rhetorics are instrumental and foundational steps in the nascent movement of immigrant rights activism. My analysis illustrates how Cristina Jiménez’s motivational rhetoric represents a crucial step of establishing discursive space for DREAMers to share their stories. Then, I examine the effective, but flawed, rhetoric of DREAMers like Leezia Dhalla who used this discursive space to establish their cultural belonging and assimilation into U.S. American society. Finally, I put forward the rhetoric of Rossy Evelyn Lima as an illustrative example of DREAMer rhetoric that productively engages the concept of cultural citizenship by pushing against its boundaries as a way to critique the often-assumed connection between legal and cultural citizenship. Before I turn to my analysis, I discuss the contested concept of “cultural citizenship,” especially as it relates to conventional understandings of citizenship and belonging.

Cultural Citizenship and DREAMers

The concept of “cultural citizenship” has its origins in the works of Renato Rosaldo and William Flores, and it is closely related to the idea of belonging in a community. For Flores, cultural citizenship “encompasses a broad range of everyday activities as well as the more visible political and social movements” in the struggle for a “distinct social space in which members of the marginalized group are free to express themselves and feel at home.”²⁵ Rosaldo similarly defines cultural citizenship as “the

right to be different (in terms of race, ethnicity, or native language) with respect to the norms of the dominant national community, without compromising one's right to belong."²⁶ Both scholars articulate the concept in relation to the idea of an "imagined community."²⁷ Imagined communities are products of what Dilip Gaonkar calls "social imaginaries" which are "ways of understanding the social that become social entities themselves, mediating collective life."²⁸ Connecting the concepts of cultural citizenship and imagined communities, J. David Cisneros argues that "citizenship indexes legal status and political rights but also refers to one's inclusion in a sociocultural and imagined community."²⁹

This nuanced definition of citizenship addresses a limitation of Rosaldo's concept of "cultural citizenship." As Aihwa Ong argues, Rosaldo "views cultural citizenship as the demand of disadvantaged subjects for full citizenship in spite of their cultural difference from mainstream society," which "gives the erroneous impression that cultural citizenship can be unilaterally constructed and that immigrant or minority groups can escape the cultural inscription of state power and other forms of regulation that define the different modalities of belonging."³⁰ In contrast, Ong defines "cultural citizenship" as "the cultural practices and beliefs produced out of negotiating the often ambivalent and contested relations with the state and its hegemonic forms that establish the criteria of belonging within a national population and territory."³¹ For her, "cultural citizenship is a dual process of self-making and being-made within webs of power linked to the nation-state and civil society."³² This definition takes into account the limitations of individual agency and the notion that no matter how effective one's assimilation into or differentiation from the dominant culture might be, one can still experience the

exclusionary cultural and legal forces of the nation-state and the dominant society. Social and cultural enclaves can be effectively carved from the public sphere, but they nonetheless engage with the public sphere to negotiate their position.

Undocumented immigrant youth have been effective in negotiating their position regarding the “American Dream” and “nation of immigrants” mythic frameworks. Some youth have established their cultural citizenship by embracing the tenets of the myths and by testifying to their assimilation, achievement, and innocence.³³ Their rhetorics employ discursive strategies and arguments similar to those used by U.S. citizens in their claims for equal rights. Anguiano and Chávez argue that undocumented youth often embody a double identity as both DREAMers and Americans, adding that their vernacular rhetoric is often a “pastiche of both dominant and resistant discourses.”³⁴ They perform the identity of the “good American,” as a way to establish their cultural citizenship, at the same time that they bemoan how their lack of legal citizenship precludes them from achieving the American Dream. Despite their protest, these DREAMers nevertheless validate the American Dream mythology, not realizing its insidious power as a tool reinforcing their oppression and marginalization.

Other undocumented youth have employed the opposite strategy of “disidentification” to show their unwillingness to conform to the norms of the myths.³⁵ Morrissey explains that “disidentification” is a queer strategy that responds to the intersectional nature of citizenship, as it is constrained by gender and sexual norms that intersect with race, class, nation, and religion.³⁶ Building on José Esteban Muñoz’s work, Morrissey notes that disidentification describes rhetorical practices that allow marginalized groups to “(co)author the very identity categories to which they always

already have been subject, reformulating the grounds upon which intercultural interactions between dominant and minority groups occur.”³⁷ Because DREAMers often do not fit the historically dominant U.S. citizen model (white, male, heterosexual, Christian, propertied, able-bodied), they use the strategy of “disidentification” to show their nonconformity and to protest the norms of U.S. citizenship. Morrissey crucially notes that “migrants’ use of disidentification is significant for the ways it works against existing U.S. citizenship structures by adopting queer strategies, metaphors, and subjectivities; but within them by reinforcing the myth of the American Dream and the strength of the nation.”³⁸

These seemingly competing strategies of embracing the American Dream and of disidentifying with it reinforce Aihwa Ong’s argument that cultural citizenship is not unilaterally established through processes of self-making, but instead is determined by webs (cultural, economic, political, social) of power through which the nation-state creates its subjects. The speeches of the three women examined in this chapter illustrate this dual process of “self-making” through one’s individual rhetoric and “being-made” through the cultural, political, economic, and social aspects of the regime of governmentality in the nation-state. In what follows, I examine the rise of undocumented youth activism and rhetoric, with Cristina Jiménez’s speech as an illustrative example.

Cristina Jiménez and the Movement of DREAM Warriors

A native of Ecuador, Cristina Jiménez is one of the founders and the managing director of United We Dream, the largest immigrant youth-led activist organization in the United States. Speaking as an activist and an organizer, Jiménez addressed a group of 600 undocumented youth in Kansas City during the 2012 United We Dream annual congress.

She sought to motivate undocumented immigrant youth to join the fight for their inclusion. Effectively, Jiménez carved out discursive space for undocumented immigrant youth to share their stories and testify to their cultural citizenship through their rhetoric of difference. In her examination of the creative works of Chicana feminists, Lisa Flores argues that “a discursive space can be opened through a rhetoric of difference which allows a marginalized group to reverse existing and external definitions and to create their own definitions.”³⁹ For Jiménez, the goal is to establish a mode of rhetorical engagement for undocumented immigrant youth to claim belonging and articulate their membership in the U.S. public sphere. As such, her rhetoric reflects what Sonja Foss and Karen Griffin describe as “invitational rhetoric,” which goes beyond persuasion in that it does not seek to change or control the audience.⁴⁰ Instead, as seen in Jiménez’s rhetorical act, it invites DREAMers to “create a relationship rooted in equality, immanent value, and self-determination.”⁴¹ Ultimately, her rhetoric illustrates Hinda Seif’s observations about the evolution of immigrant youth organizing in the past decades, culminating in their self-organized activism.⁴²

In 2010, undocumented immigrant youth were spurred to act by a partial legislative victory, as the DREAM Act passed the House of Representatives. The victory inspired an “unprecedented campaign led by affected youth and their allies of letter writing, petitioning, and organizing rallies; hunger strikes; and acts of civil disobedience.”⁴³ Cristina Jiménez, in particular, played a central role “organizing the successful national campaign that led to the creation and implementation of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival Program (DACA) under President Obama.”⁴⁴ The success of DACA inspired more and more immigrant youth to use the queer strategy of “coming

out” to declare that they are “undocumented and unafraid.” Hinda Seif observes that when undocumented immigrant youth “come out,” they “make their plight visible, reject shame, and confront their fears.”⁴⁵ Through their “coming out,” immigrant youth are “challenging the boundaries of citizenship and insisting on their human rights by becoming civic actors, even when they are not citizens or even in the United States legally.”⁴⁶ Immigrant youth played a central role in gaining support for the DREAM Act, forming regional support networks such as “the California DREAM Network, the New York State Youth Leadership Council, and the Student Immigrant Movement in Massachusetts,” and national networks like “DreamActivist.org and United We DREAM.”⁴⁷

Co-founded in 2008 by Cristina Jiménez and Julieta Garibay, United We Dream has become the largest immigrant youth-led organization in the United States. The mission of the organization is to “empower people to develop their leadership, their organizing skills, and to develop our own [sic] campaigns to fight for justice and dignity for immigrants and all people.”⁴⁸ Every two years, the organization hosts its national congress, a gathering that offers “a unique space where undocumented youth can move from living in the shadows to feeling confident, connected and alive.”⁴⁹ Among the organization’s guiding principles is the belief that “the art of sharing personal stories is the most important tool in order to create the changes we wish to see in the world.”⁵⁰ At the same time, United We Dream is committed to organizing “at the grassroots level to build relationships and empower communities to articulate and implement those answers by elevating their work, not individual voices,” recognizing that “in order to create a strong organization and be part of a larger movement we create spaces where members

are constantly learning, challenging themselves and their peers and seeking personal and collective empowerment.”⁵¹ The grassroots organizing of undocumented immigrant youth succeeded owing to charismatic and rhetorically powerful leaders such as Cristina Jiménez. Her speech is a representative sample of a germinal moment in immigrant activism in which her leadership and motivational rhetoric became the contextual catalyst that inspired immigrant youth across the country to come out of the shadows and protest their sociopolitical exclusion.

In her 2012 keynote address to the United We Dream national congress, Jiménez used a narrative mode of development to share personal experiences as pleas to create audience identification through which she invites undocumented immigrant youth to see her story as a model for future activism, as well as a source of courage when facing the everyday hardships of undocumented life in the United States. Although she spoke as a leader, celebrating the power of DREAMers as “dream warriors,” Jiménez details the challenges, obstacles, and hardships of her personal development that turned her into a leader. Identifying story telling as the most powerful tool of the DREAMer movement, she urges young people to share their stories and build a “dream nation full of dream warriors” who fight for their inclusion in the United States.⁵² As a result, Jiménez’s two narratives of becoming become models designed to inspire undocumented immigrant youth to strive for access to education and to fight against the U.S. deportation regime that targets them and their families as excludable aliens. Rhetorically, the two narratives portray her journey from precarity to empowerment, and from empowerment to activism.

Jiménez’s first narrative begins at the time she applied to college and encountered the harsh reality of undocumented youth who are either barred from attending college

altogether or are forced to pay out-of-state tuition. Jiménez shares her personal experience of the “painful moment...when you were told you couldn’t go to college because you didn’t have papers.”⁵³ Sharing the story promotes identification between speaker and audience, a primary goal of feminine style discourses. Jiménez’s story illustrates a common reality that parents try to “shield” their children from “the trauma of undocumented status until the last possible moment: when it is time to fill out college applications.”⁵⁴ In Jiménez’s case, it was a high school academic advisor who refused to sign her college application because she didn’t have documents to show legal presence in the United States. Effectively, the incident reveals the broad powers of federal and state apparatuses to police the borders of citizenship and the U.S. nation-state by refusing undocumented immigrants access to education. Second, the incident enables Jiménez to describe a common undocumented immigrant “reality,” which further exposes the powers and interests of the nation-state. Hinda Seif observes that “rather than a joyful rite of passage, graduation signifies a traumatic change of status and identity from student to socially stigmatized ‘illegal alien’ and illegal worker.”⁵⁵ Jiménez recalls that the encounter with her academic advisor briefly changed her perspective and “set her reality,” that she had to “give up” her dreams because she was undocumented and would have to get a job at the local supermarket, essentially becoming an undocumented domestic worker.⁵⁶

Her rejection by the academic advisor illustrates the way in which many undocumented immigrant youths are differentially included and forced into the realm of social death. Yen Le Espiritu describes “differential inclusion” as a process in which immigrants are “deemed integral to the nation’s economy, culture, identity, and power –

but integral only or precisely because of their designated subordinate standing.”⁵⁷

Recalling her experience, Jiménez did not express fear of being deported; instead, she expressed a sense of despair about her future. “Setting her reality” was the recognition of the glass ceiling that limits the lives of undocumented immigrants. Immigration law, along with the various federal and state apparatuses that police the lives of immigrants, including high school academic counselors, prevents undocumented immigrant youth from professional development by restricting access to education, forcing them into a life in the shadows as domestic and unskilled workers, where they can be exploited and underpaid.⁵⁸ Undocumented workers’ rights vary, but even in states that grant rights to minimum wage and workers’ insurance, undocumented immigrants often do not exercise their rights out of fear they would be targeted for deportation, as employers control them by threatening to report them to Immigration and Customs Enforcement.⁵⁹ Jiménez’s story of an academic counselor’s refusal to sign a college admission application is part of a broad legal and socioeconomic landscape which produces cheap and exploitable labor from undocumented immigrant youth. Restricting access to education effectively limits the life choices of undocumented immigrant children and sets them on a path toward a lifetime of low-skilled, low-paid labor. Under current immigration law, and based on the provisions of DACA, certain undocumented immigrant students qualify for “deferred action” and “deportation relief,” which has increased labor force participation, but has had no significant effect on the likelihood that they would attend college.⁶⁰ Even legislation that purports to benefit undocumented immigrant children does little to remove barriers to education; instead, it furthers the U.S. economic interests of maintaining a disposable population of low-skilled and low-paid laborers.

Jiménez's first rhetorical intervention interrupts the normalized path that restricts access to education and forces undocumented youth into a life in the shadows. Following the vivid description of this "painful moment," Jiménez introduces her mother as the person who inspired her and pushed her to fight. Jiménez recounts her mother's reaction of shock to Jiménez's moment of weakness:

Your dad and I sacrificed so much to come to this country, leaving everything behind, working every day – weekends, nights, mornings – to pull you through school, and for you to become the first person in our family to go to college, and you are going to give up?⁶¹

Her mother's question and the reminder of parental sacrifice implored Jiménez to fight. Her mother encouraged her, saying, "I have faith! Don't worry about the money, you are going to school."⁶² Jiménez uses this story to create identification between herself and her listeners, urging them to celebrate the role of strong mothers in their lives. Her personal narrative celebrating her mother as a source of courage creates a model for action and an alternative path for undocumented immigrant youth who might have otherwise become complacent about a potential future in the shadows as uneducated low-paid laborers. As Jiménez was empowered by her mother's strong will and faith, her personal tone and the disclosure of her personal experience exemplify her use of a feminine rhetorical style to empower other undocumented youth in similar situations to fight for access to education and to protest their exclusion. Her personal fight for education becomes a model of empowerment, a communal fight of dream warriors, in which "dream" stands for their individual dreams and for their support of the DREAM Act. Characteristic of the feminine style of rhetoric, Jiménez uses an informal and emotional tone to share her personal narrative to produce cohesion with the audience of

DREAMers and to create discursive space fostering their transformation into agents of change.

The story of her college application relies on personal disclosure to establish connection with her auditors on a personal level, humanizing her struggles and hardships, shifting the narrative away from legal/illegal distinctions. The affective dimension of storytelling enables Jiménez to put forward a model of informal citizenship as a model for others to engage the U.S. public sphere. By creating this discursive space, Jiménez attempts to reframe the undocumented DREAMer as a sociopolitical subject with agency. Jiménez's second narrative of becoming illustrates the rhetorical function of such reframing. She details her sense of empowerment and decision to come out of the shadows, escape the realm of social death, and become an immigrant-rights activist.

Describing herself as a “closeted DREAMer,” Jiménez recalls how in her early years as an adult she was scared to speak about her undocumented status: “I did not want to put myself and my family at the risk of being deported.”⁶³ Her fears were stirred by a national political climate that was hostile to undocumented immigrants. Jiménez remembers how “our” country was going through a “tremendous anti-immigrant wave” characterized by “massive workplace raids,” “ICE coming into the homes of our community and detaining mothers and fathers, breaking families apart,” and legislative efforts, such as H.R. 4437 The Border Protection, Anti-terrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005, which sought to mandate the everyday policing of immigrants in churches, schools, and other public places.⁶⁴ She evocatively recalls how “our families” watched the news from Bedford, Massachusetts, where “300 mothers and fathers were detained in the middle of the day and put in deportation proceedings, leaving all of their

children in school behind, with no one to pick them up.”⁶⁵ She uses the image of helpless children being left behind to illustrate how deportation raids break families apart. Doing so, she invokes both the “communitarian” and “familial” iterations of the myth of an immigrant nation, appealing to the narrative theme of immigrant innocence.⁶⁶

Jiménez situates herself among an audience of helpless and scared families confined to the realm of social death under the constant threat of official state and federal anti-immigrant efforts. The repeated references to “our” families and country are efforts to rhetorically create cohesion among a disenfranchised population of immigrants who lack legal status. Jiménez illustrates the importance of such cohesion, reminding her listeners how, in 2006, H.R. 4437 galvanized over half a million immigrants and their allies to march through the streets of Los Angeles to protest the injustices committed against them and their communities by federal and state authorities.⁶⁷ J. David Cisneros argues that the protest marches of immigrants that swept the United States in 2006 showed a kind of unity and cohesion that illustrated the enactment of a “hybrid” form of citizenship by people who lacked legal status.⁶⁸ The marches of immigrants and their allies marked an important rhetorical moment as people stepped out of the shadows and into the streets, making their presence visible and in opposition to the regime that policed their lives.

The passage of federal legislation such as the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act, as well as state legislation such as 1994’s California Proposition 187 and 2010’s Arizona S.B.1070, effectively transformed the way in which immigrants encounter the borders of the U.S. nation-state, allowing the border to follow immigrants, especially those racialized, in their daily lives in the interior of the United

States.⁶⁹ Such legislative efforts pushed undocumented immigrants, like Cristina Jiménez, into life “in the shadows” and the realm of social death, being unable to travel, lest they be detained and placed in deportation proceedings, as was the case of her partner Walter. For Jiménez, Walter’s detention redefined the threat of deportation and her life of fear in the shadows:

The fact that he was detained and that I was facing the risk of not seeing him ever again was what infused me with courage. And I got rid of my fear. And I said, fuck all of this! Because I did not want anyone in my family or any other friend to go through the experience that Walter went through.⁷⁰

She details her personal experience, outwardly expressing her emotions of fear and frustration, barely holding back her tears. She uses the affective power of her personal experience as an appeal to her audience, who have experienced similar fears in their own lives and who have grown tired of living a life of fear in the shadows. Her moment of realization and reaction strike on a deeply human level, rhetorically inviting undocumented immigrant youth to protest their differential inclusion in the nation. Effectively, Jiménez’s rhetoric protests the precarity of undocumented life in the shadows as “bare life.”⁷¹ She uses her personal narrative to express the pain and fear of losing someone close as rhetorical exigence for her call to stand up to protest a broken immigration system that places undocumented immigrants in such precarious positions.

Walter’s detention was a source of empowerment and liberation, which led her to “fully commit to this fight.”⁷² She uses the imagery of a fight and immigrant activists as warriors. Stressing the personal and experiential nature of her fight, she bears testimony to her fear, humanizing herself and calling on her audience of undocumented immigrant youth to sympathize and to identify with her fight. In this rhetorical performance of

feminine style, Jiménez becomes consubstantial with her audience, a process in which her story becomes their story, overcoming her fear becomes their overcoming, and her fight becomes theirs, collectively creating the “power” of DREAM warriors. Her story jolts listeners out of complacency about a life in the shadows, as she calls on them to join the fight. She transforms each undocumented immigrant’s personal fight into the unified political fight of a community of undocumented people.

Carving out discursive space for the rhetorics of undocumented immigrant youth as empowered political subjects is a central goal of Jiménez’s speech. The stories of her college application and her partner’s detention portray the precarious life of undocumented immigrants, who are denied access to education, unable to travel, forced into a life of low-paid labor, and live under the constant threat of deportation. Her stories are models for overcoming fear and gathering courage, culminating in a key slogan of the DREAMer movement: Undocumented and Unafraid.⁷³ Jiménez uses her speech to inspire others to become DREAM warriors and to build power together. Storytelling has an affective dimension that allows Jiménez’s listeners to realize the ties that bind them as both human beings and political actors, promoting their empowerment and serving as catalyst for their self-organizing and grassroots activism. The kind of affective power that Jiménez promotes is produced by undocumented immigrant youth sharing the stories of their individual experiences, but also by their gathering to write their collective story for the future. Jiménez calls on them to move beyond the clean and simple talking points of DREAMers as high-achieving students, who aspire to contribute to America, and who were innocently brought to the country at a young age by their parents.⁷⁴

Jiménez promotes the key messages of the “Undocumented and Unafraid” theme: (1) that undocumented youth should stop being ashamed and openly admit their undocumented status; (2) that they should stop using the clean narrative of the good and deserving immigrant who conform to the norms and expectations of U.S. culture and society; and (3) that they should not demonize or blame parents or “less deserving” immigrants, and instead assert their presence as “rights bearing human beings.”⁷⁵ Jiménez empowers her audience, actively calling upon them to reject standard talking points and to share their personal stories, noting that “the choice that we have in front of us is that we can write our own story!” Intersecting the imagery of dreamers and warriors, she notes that their fight is not “about a bill or a legislation,” rather it is about “dreaming” and about “defining that vision, that change that we want to see in our communities.”⁷⁶ Effectively, Jiménez inspires her audience to fight and to “dream” about their escape from the realm of social death by developing their own identities and personalities, rejecting their ascribed status as “illegals.”

To that end, Jiménez celebrates President Obama’s executive action to implement DACA, precisely because it helped undocumented youth escape the realm of social death and be recognized as actual human beings, not as “illegals.” Notably, she gives DREAMer activists the credit for this legislative victory:

On June 15 all of the organizing that you, and I, and this movement together led us to the victory of deferred action. Brothers and sisters, this is the biggest victory of the immigrant community in the history of this country since 1986. This is major! Take that in! Do you own this victory? Raise your hand! Are you proud of this victory? Yes!⁷⁷

Speaking from her empowered persona as a leader, Jiménez reminds immigrant youth that this victory is not enough, that they need to continue to fight, even in the face

of defeat. Rather than engaging with the standard norms of political decorum and process, Jiménez reminds her audience that legislative defeats, such as the 2010 failure of the DREAM Act in the U.S. Congress, would not kill “our warrior spirit,” and notes that “we are going to push to stop the deportation of DREAMers, and it doesn’t matter all the people that tell us we cannot do this!”⁷⁸ Defying decorum and the normative image of the DREAMer as an honor student and a model immigrant, Jiménez exclaims, “Fuck that! We are going to show you what is possible!”⁷⁹

Speaking from her precarious position as a woman and an undocumented immigrant, Jiménez bypasses the normative model immigrant celebrated by the “nation of immigrants” mythic framework. By creating a discursive space for the rhetoric of undocumented immigrant youth, Jiménez does not claim or demand formal citizenship. Her demands, and those of DREAM warriors, stress the realization of informal citizenship, seeking to escape their existing position of inclusive-exclusion and the realm of social death. Jiménez rhetorically establishes an image of herself as an immigrant that destabilizes the norms of innocence, assimilation, and achievement usually attributed to the “good” or “legal” immigrant. The experiential, emotional, and dramatic nature of her rhetorical style brings to light the effects on immigrant lives of a system preoccupied with legal/illegal distinctions. In Jiménez’s rhetoric, these distinctions have no place, as she shifts the narrative to establish new ways in which immigrants can interact with and navigate through the U.S. public sphere as cultural citizens who are both self-made and being-made through the webs of power the nation-state and the dominant culture of U.S. civil society.⁸⁰ Effectively, Jiménez creates a DREAMer subjectivity defined by cultural citizenship as a mode of being and acting in society regardless of legal/illegal status or

the norms of the American Dream mythology. In helping establish discursive space for other undocumented youth to fight for and define their inclusion in U.S. society, Jiménez does not prescribe how immigrants are to make their claims for belonging; instead, she urges them to share their own stories as their most powerful rhetorical tool.

In what follows, I examine the speeches of Leezia Dhalla and Rossy Evelyn Lima as rhetorical acts that operate in the discursive space created by Jiménez. They illustrate a contrast in the way undocumented immigrant youth have followed Jiménez's call to share their stories, revealing a disparity of experiences and tactics, ultimately complicating the collective identity of the DREAMer movement through different enactments of cultural citizenship.

A New Generation of DREAMers

In the years following United We Dream's inception and the election of Barack Obama, undocumented immigrant youth activism began to escalate with thousands of students organizing locally and nationally.⁸¹ Increased media attention to DREAM Act legislative efforts, as well as the activism of undocumented immigrants like Cristina Jiménez, helped create a more welcoming discursive space for undocumented youth to come out of the shadows and speak against what they perceived to be an unjust U.S. system of immigration. Hinda Seif notes that since 2009, many "undocumented students and their allies have resorted to radical activism," addressing "intersectional identities and political commitments," through creative and sometimes militant actions.⁸² Other undocumented youth used the more conventional method of public address, using college campuses to "educate about their plight; advocate for relevant policies and laws."⁸³ As college campuses increasingly began to host TEDx events, undocumented immigrant

students took the stage to advocate and inform both immediate and mediated audiences about their lives as undocumented immigrants.

Leezia Dhalla and Rossy Evelyn Lima are two women who revealed their stories as undocumented immigrants at TEDx conferences held at university campuses. The two women offer contrasting narratives of the undocumented immigrant experience. They speak in the discursive space Cristina Jiménez helped to carve out, as they respond to the exigence to share their individual stories of undocumented life in the United States. By speaking at TEDx conferences, their speeches are constrained by the highly formulaic format of these events to present “ideas worth spreading.”⁸⁴ Their speeches also differ from that of Jiménez because the two women do not address other undocumented immigrant youth; instead they use the schematized and scripted format of the TED talk to reach broader audiences in an effort to inspire social change.⁸⁵ Their two speeches exhibit characteristics of the emergent genre of the TED Talk, as they “orient and conventionalize communication and they create the very stage upon which identity and community building takes place.”⁸⁶ However, their speeches constitute different rhetorical modes of engagement with the U.S. public sphere. The two women present somewhat disparate ideas about the immigrant identity, the place of immigrants in the national community, and ultimately, about what cultural citizenship looks like. Both Dhalla and Lima speak from the complex precarious position of non-citizen women, utilizing elements identified as feminine rhetorical style to plead with their audiences. However, their stories show that elements of the feminine style can (re)produce two disparate versions of the “American Dream” and the “nation of immigrants” myths.

Leezia Dhalla's depiction of an immigrant dream incorporates the narrative of the American Dream and the overlap creates a kind of cultural citizenship that embraces the "capitalist" and "familial" iterations of the "nation of immigrants" myth. By contrast, Rossy Evelyn Lima's story depicts an immigrant dream that rejects the logics of the nation-state, reflecting her experience as a young woman who was, and continues to be, a cultural foreigner to the United States. Their contrasting narratives illustrate the complexity of the role and position of immigrants in the U.S. public sphere, complicating the concept of cultural citizenship and its connection to legal citizenship in the U.S. nation-state.

Leezia Dhalla is the daughter of Canadian immigrants. In her story, she stresses that she "came here legally" but unknowingly overstayed her visitor visa. Economic hardship prompted her father to move from Canada to the United States for work, leaving his wife and daughter in Canada, later helping them apply for non-immigrant visitor visas.⁸⁷ The story of Dhalla's family journey as immigrants resembles dominant narratives about U.S immigration from the 18th and 19th centuries, when German, Italian, and Irish men would make the transatlantic voyage to America to seek economic opportunity and later pay for their families to join them in the New World.⁸⁸ Dhalla uses her story to expose how the often-celebrated mythical narrative of immigrants moving to America in search for a better life for their families did not apply to her. As such, her rhetorical strategy of using allusion to previous generations of immigrants and the trope of the immigrant journey resonates with Enrique Morones' strategy of creating consubstantiality between contemporary undocumented immigrants and the mythically embraced immigrants from Northern Europe. Dhalla frames her story as a journey of

transformation, from someone who grew up in the United States, to someone who did not have the legal authorization to live in the United States.

Throughout the first part of her story, Dhalla stresses assimilation as a key requirement of U.S. immigration, as she shares detailed memories, arguing, “I feel American, I always have.”⁸⁹ Additionally, she engages the theme of immigrant innocence, through which she constructs an image of herself and her family as the opposite of “those illegal aliens,” who are “criminal,” who take “our jobs,” and who “don’t even speak English.”⁹⁰ She repeatedly emphasizes that her father came to the United States legally, that she was brought to the country legally, and that her family had filled the paperwork, paid the fees, and had 20-year track record of paying taxes in the United States. Implicitly, however, she differentially devalues the experiences of those allegedly criminal “illegal aliens” by stressing that she is not that kind of immigrant.⁹¹ Using her experience as a model, she seeks to evoke empathy by presenting herself as the “right” kind of immigrant, as the one who has successfully assimilated into American-ness, and the one who embodies and recreates the founding myth of a “nation of immigrants.”

Indeed, Dhalla invokes the narrative of the American Dream to establish consubstantiality with her audience.⁹² Using allusion, Dhalla invokes the mythical greatness of “our founding fathers” who believed in the American Dream, reminding her audience that none of them were “born American,” instead “they all became American.”⁹³ Doing so, she questions U.S. American citizenship as a status attribute; instead, presenting it as a process of becoming and assimilation. She further reminds her audience that “many of our nation’s immigrants were paperless but their dreams of

prosperity gave their children and their children's children the ability to call themselves American," observing that "many of those children are in this audience."⁹⁴ This appeal to the audience's empathy is based around an idea of citizenship as enacted or earned over time, which Dhalla argues, her family has done over their 20 years in the United States. Her narrative illustrates Anne Demo's argument that "the sole prerequisite for assimilation in the twenty-first century has become our identification with and enactment of American dream ideology."⁹⁵

She dedicates a portion of her speech to document her personal assimilation as evidence of her cultural citizenship, such as learning the pledge of allegiance, the words to the Star-Spangled Banner, wearing cowboy boots, and learning how to square dance. For Dhalla, cultural citizenship is intrinsically tied to cultural assimilation, showing her willingness to adhere to the dominant norms of U.S. society. In the process of establishing her cultural belonging and assimilation, and by retelling her family's story of "becoming American," she distances herself from the image of the "illegal" immigrant. Doing so, she ends up validating the concept of illegality and the idea that some immigrants are indeed "illegal" and less-deserving of the audience's empathy. She reminds her audience of this contrast toward the end of her speech, when she notes that "about half of the undocumented population came here without authorization, there is no record of them having crossed the border," while "the other half, including myself, we came here legally."⁹⁶ Perhaps unintentionally, Dhalla's repeated reminders of her legal arrival and cultural belonging function rhetorically to present her as someone who deserves a path to citizenship, while diminishing the claims of those who crossed the border illegally.

Dhalla's cultural belonging and assimilation as "the good immigrant" are the backdrop for her dramatic realization of "a reality that wasn't mine, until suddenly it was," that she was one of "those illegal aliens."⁹⁷ Dhalla crafts a dramatic narrative of how her American life was disrupted by the burden of being undocumented. Dhalla did not grow up in the realm of social death; instead, she enjoyed most of the freedoms and liberties of a U.S. citizen. The very beginning of her story is about her as a regular (American) college student who returned from a ski trip with her friends to find a letter from the Department of Homeland Security. Her story is about the shock of something that was not supposed to happen to her. Similarly, as she absolves her parents of blame, stressing how they played by the rules and filled out all the forms, she once again creates the notion that they did not deserve to be lumped into the "illegal" status, as they had done everything in their powers to become Americans. Dhalla's appeal to consubstantiality with the audience is based on their willingness to empathize with her and her family as "American in every single way except by virtue of birth."⁹⁸ She completes her speech with an appeal to the audience: "somewhere in your lineage someone took a leap of faith to come into America and they gave you the chance to fulfill your dreams (...) will you please help me fulfill mine?"⁹⁹ Even her appeal to the American Dream is individualized and based on her deserving a path to citizenship.

Indeed, Dhalla's effort to advocate immigration policy reform relies on an immigrant's innocence and capacity to assimilate as qualifications that determine an immigrant as deserving of a path to citizenship. In the process, she implicitly validates the idea that some "illegal" immigrants do not have the same claim to inclusion as she does. Even as she decries the politics that ignore the lives of 11 million immigrants

without papers, she repeatedly emphasizes the need for a path to citizenship for “people like me, who were brought here when we were children.”¹⁰⁰

Dhalla’s rhetorical performance of feminine style to stress her cultural assimilation is highly evocative. Her appeals are experiential, grounded in dramatic and emotional storytelling, relying on her ability to prove cultural belonging and assimilation in the U.S. public sphere and culture. Her advocacy for immigration reform works from her position of privilege as a college graduate of Northwestern University, who benefited from DACA, which Dhalla says was a “huge sigh of relief,” but was also “a temporary solution to a much longer term problem, because it expires in two years, and beyond that my life is uncertain.”¹⁰¹ The fear that her life may “come crashing down at any moment” makes it necessary for her to “hide in plain sight,” and she notes that “it’s hard to keep your head down and your chin up at the same time.”¹⁰² Through Dhalla’s testimony, the audience is able to see DACA as a temporary solution that does not help undocumented immigrant youth make their escape from the realm of social death. Her narrative also exposes the narrow limits of inclusion established by DACA as a program that perpetuates the binary of deserving and undeserving immigrants.

Overall, Leezia Dhalla’s powerful narrative with its appeals to liberation and inclusion works as a double-edged sword, advancing her personal situation but doing little for, or even damaging, the claims to inclusion and belonging of undocumented immigrants who do not share her circumstances and position of relative privilege and her willingness to assimilate into normative American-ness. Her speech illustrates Claudia Anguiano and Karma Chávez’s argument that some undocumented immigrant youth “protest their exclusions from actualizing their American Dream as the legal limits of

citizenship pose a barrier at every turn at the same time that they uphold the myth of the American Dream.”¹⁰³ As such, Dhalla’s rhetoric is self-defeating in its effort simultaneously to protest and celebrate the legal structures that exclude her as an undocumented immigrant.

In contrast, Rossy Evelyn Lima offers an example of an immigrant experience that is equally valid and rhetorically powerful, but one that offers an escape from the logics of the “deserving” DREAMer. In 2015, Lima was invited to speak at a TEDx event in McAllen, Texas, and to share her story as an undocumented immigrant. Like Jiménez and Dhalla, Lima employs elements of the feminine style in her rhetorical act. However, Lima uses them to enact belonging and cultural citizenship without appealing to the dominant themes of immigrant assimilation, innocence, or achievement.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, Lima confesses to illegally crossing the U.S.-Mexico border. She begins her story with a short poem describing the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, and then continues with a vivid story of her border crossing at the age of 13. Noteworthy in her story is the feeling of trepidation, uncertainty, and danger, as Lima and her mother ran across the border:

We ran. Pushing aside thorns and branches with our pierced hands, with our backs arched to pass through the wilderness. I was so thirsty. My eyes wide open. Feeling my heart pound all over my entire body. For a moment I thought my legs were going to give up. But the thought of my mother slowing down for me and getting caught kept me running. The Border Patrol was at a visible sight. We heard the door of the van close, but we didn’t look back.¹⁰⁵

This dramatic narrative of Lima’s experience resonates with the stories of death and violence against migrants shared by Enrique Morones. It also stands in stark contrast to Dhalla’s immigrant journey. Unlike Dhalla, whose father applied for her tourist visa, Lima’s story of arrival reveals a much more dangerous experience. As noted earlier,

Dhalla points to this difference in her speech when she emphasizes that she “came here legally.”¹⁰⁶ The stigma of illegality is amplified in Lima’s story as she paints a picture of the dangerous act of illegal border crossing. But instead of using the legal/illegal binary, Lima shifts the emphasis to her personal experience and the effect it had on her. Rather than adopting the persona of an expert who might use personal stories to reinforce a political narrative or agenda, Lima uses her experience as an implicit argument against the label of illegality. She explains how the event of her illegal border crossing represented and defined who she was as a person: “the stranger, the foreigner, the immigrant who does not belong.”¹⁰⁷ A large portion of Lima’s experience as the immigrant-stranger was characterized by her struggle to adapt to a new culture and by the fear of being arrested. She uses the story to describe both the damaging impact of illegality on immigrant’s sense of identity and personhood, but also to establish the context for her liberation from the realm of social death. She notes that by her second year in the United States, she was “tired of being afraid,” and explains that writing poetry was her way to liberation.¹⁰⁸

Throughout her speech, Lima details the numerous times and ways the border traveled with her to create obstacles for her future. Like Jiménez, Lima encountered the border when she applied to start college as an undocumented immigrant. Recalling the imagery of her initial border crossing, Lima speaks about her college applications: “I saw my path become a border filled with thorns and branches, with the reminder that I was still a foreigner, that I did not belong.”¹⁰⁹ Similar obstacles and fears emerged during her graduate education, when she was unable to attend classes on the Houston campus of her university because of immigration checkpoints on highways in the southern parts of

Texas. Noting that she was “just about to lose all hope” of finishing her education and pursuing her dream career as an educator, Lima describes the introduction of DACA in 2012 as “a law that eliminated my constant fear of being deported and allowed me to work.”¹¹⁰ Rather than appeal to the logics of assimilation into U.S. American culture, Lima presents her story as one of becoming. In this story, she chooses to define herself as an educator and an advocate, thus refusing to allow her “illegal” status to define her identity. Whereas Dhalla stresses her innocence, absolving herself from responsibility in her parents’ decision to move to the United States, Lima reframes her undocumented status as an opportunity, noting that: “the struggling experiences I faced as an undocumented immigrant were at times terribly frightful and painful, yet they have shaped who I am, and my experience as an immigrant writer.”¹¹¹

Lima also reframes the dominant theme of immigrant achievement. Pursuing her dream to become a university professor, Lima details her involvement in the development of college programs that promote education for young people regardless of their (il)legal status. She speaks of the experience as a way to “take an active role in a society where I had been invisible.”¹¹² This way, achievement is presented as a rhetorical enactment of citizenship based around civic duties and acts, rather than the ascribed rights and privileges of formal citizenship.¹¹³ In sharing her struggles and challenges, and her decision to become an advocate and activist, Lima’s story is similar to the story of Cristina Jiménez, who also had grown up with the fear of being different, and of being arrested, but eventually gained the courage to stop being afraid to become an activist and, thus, take on the public and civic responsibilities of citizenship.

As such, Lima's story stands in contrast to Leezia Dhalla's experience of growing up as a cultural insider and as someone who "belongs." Unlike Dhalla's story, Lima's story of becoming an immigrant resists the logics of assimilation, achievement, and innocence. In Lima's immigrant experience, in which she reminisces about her home and the "family we have been unable to hug again, the ones we couldn't say goodbye to," one does not need to abandon their culture or family ties in order to become an American.¹¹⁴ This allows for a more complex immigrant identity, not limited to idealized visions or narratives of belonging. Doing so, she redefines the relationship between legal and illegal, deserving and undeserving, immigrant and citizen. Lima rhetorically offers a mode of civic engagement and an enactment of citizenship in which "we are immigrants when we decide to cross the threshold, to follow our dreams, to fulfill our destiny despite our situation."¹¹⁵

She concludes her story with an appeal to consubstantiality, claiming that "we are all immigrants, overcoming obstacles, and deciding to reinvent ourselves in a new world," adding that "we are immigrants in the unknown territory of what lies ahead, breaking our literal and metaphorical borders," and reminding her audience that "as long as you have a dream, everything will be just fine. Todo estará bien."¹¹⁶ As such, Lima expands her model of citizenship as civic engagement with the U.S. public sphere, not just to undocumented immigrants, but to U.S. citizens as well. Her model of "dreaming" is a way of thinking about citizenship in a way that does not explicitly reject its logics. Instead, it rejects the dominant idea of citizenship as status and reframes citizenship as a mode of enactment: "we define who we are with our actions, and not with a label."¹¹⁷ Lima does not appeal for inclusion into the institution of nation-state citizenship. Instead,

she promotes a kind of cultural citizenship in which individuals are able to define their sense of belonging and carve their own path to citizenship, but do so by resisting the normative webs of power to create legal/illegal subjectivities. In other words, Lima's narrative rhetorically subverts the power of the nation-state to grant citizenship or legal status, and instead celebrates the value and contributions of each person brave enough to fight to fulfill their dreams. Lima's conclusions are not only a form of resistance against the power of the nation-state to define people as "illegal," but also offer a reconceptualization of the value and nature of citizenship.

Conclusion

With this chapter, I examined how three undocumented immigrant women appealed for their formal inclusion in the United States through different engagements with the myths of the American Dream and the United States as a "nation of immigrants." Approaching the three speeches as rhetorical enactments of informal and cultural citizenship, I argue that they illustrate the persuasive powers of individual immigrant narratives that incorporate elements of the feminine rhetorical style. At the same time, they illustrate that vernacular rhetorics do not always challenge the established norms of U.S. cultural citizenship, offering competing visions of immigrant inclusion and the immigrant identity.

Through my analysis, I articulated how the three women defined their identities as both DREAMers and Americans either recasting or reifying the myth of the United States as an immigrant nation. The three speeches illustrate a fraction of the diversity of undocumented immigrant experiences and circumstances. Hinda Seif observes that "although immigrant youth civic education and engagement varies related to

characteristics such as length of time in the United States and country of origin, respecting and valuing their connection to their immigrant and co-ethnic identities, families, and communities supports, rather than detracts, from their civic development,” adding that “they are especially ripe for participating in efforts that promote opportunities and social justice for these populations.”¹¹⁸ Departing from Seif’s findings, my analysis illustrates a problematic contradiction in how undocumented immigrant youth perceive their group identity and belonging, based on different understandings and enactments of cultural citizenship. The three immigrant women recast the established narrative themes of achievement, assimilation, and innocence in competing and contrasting ways. All three undocumented immigrant women present narratives that promote individual empowerment through inductive structures and experiential reasoning.¹¹⁹ Their claims to inclusion and belonging differ in the way they engage with tropes of the deserving/undeserving immigrant.

Empowered by her personal struggles as an undocumented immigrant, Cristina Jiménez speaks as a leader to create discursive space for DREAMers to share their stories and fight for their inclusion, as a mode of engagement with the U.S. public sphere. At the same time, she urges immigrant youth to resist the appeal of narratives of the deserving and innocent immigrant, because these tend to demonize other immigrants. Using the affective powers of storytelling, Jiménez creates consubstantiality with immigrant youth in the audience, establishing a discursive space that invites the coalitional potential for different groups of undocumented immigrant youth to fight together as “dream warriors” against a dominant cultural and political order that treats them as “illegal.”¹²⁰

Serving as an example of the kind of rhetoric Jiménez promotes, Rossy Evelyn Lima's approach relies on the implicit subversion of the legal/illegal binary, arguing that "we are all immigrants," using her personal experience as an effort to establish consubstantiality and appeal to the audience's empathy without having to prove her innocence, assimilation, or achievement. Lima uses a rhetoric of difference to reach outside literal and metaphorical borders of identity, promoting a cosmopolitan version of cultural citizenship, as an alternative to legal citizenship in the nation-state.¹²¹ Nevertheless, her speech illustrates Megan Morrissey's argument that even narratives that disidentify undocumented youth from the norms embedded in the American Dream mythology do not actively reject the logics of the myth, and by extension – the logics of formal citizenship.¹²²

In contrast, Leezia Dhalla spoke in the discursive space established by Jiménez, using experiential reasoning, to personally distance herself from the "illegal" image. Even as she advocates for immigration policy reform, she pleads with her audience to help her fulfill *her* American Dream, revealing the self-serving nature of her appeal as the deserving, innocent, and Americanized immigrant. Her speech illustrates that experiential reasoning, as an element of the feminine rhetorical style, works effectively to support the appeals for inclusion of some immigrant youth, but it problematically reifies the criterion of the "deserving" immigrant grounded in the narrative themes of innocence, assimilation, and achievement. Indeed, undocumented immigrant youth like Dhalla have utilized the themes to facilitate their personal enfranchisement, and in doing so have invalidated the claims of inclusion of immigrants who can't, or won't, appeal to the same themes. In doing so, Dhalla protests her individual exclusion from the myth of the

American Dream, while simultaneously validating its premises and embedded logics of inclusion/exclusion.¹²³

As my analysis has shown, all three women display highly personal feelings about their experiences. They use dramatic delivery to raise consciousness and create dissonance among the deeply held beliefs about “illegal” immigration and their personal stories of struggle. They plead and argue inductively, using their experiences as different models of cultural citizenship. Even though they stress the importance of citizenship as a mode of engagement, the rhetoric of the three women reveals nuances in their willingness to reject the logics of formal citizenship as status that determines their position in the U.S. public sphere. Specifically, we saw how Dhalla relies on the dominant logics of cultural assimilation and validates citizen/alien distinctions, by arguing the worthiness of a foreign national to appeal to the nation-state for their path to citizenship. By contrast, Lima uses her personal tone and narrative development to present her lived experience as a model for personal empowerment that rejects the nation-state’s powers to define one’s identity and control one’s life through a label, such as citizen or alien.

Finally, all three women appeal to create consubstantiality between them and their audiences. They use this element of the feminine rhetorical style to create a sense of group cohesion and identity. But their speeches also illustrate differences in how undocumented immigrant youth define their identities as DREAMers, as either dream warrior-activists, as deserving dreamers, or as dreamers for a more inclusive world. They also illustrate different relationships with audiences. Jiménez constructs a second persona of dream warriors, seeking to energize her audience as activists. Dhalla, on the other hand, uses a more traditional method of pleading with her audience by portraying them as

the descendants of immigrants, and as gatekeepers of U.S. citizenship. She appeals to shared immigrant histories, and pleads with her audience to help her fulfill her own immigrant dream. Finally, Lima adopts an argumentative style through which she neither pleads with her audience, nor does she seek to motivate them as a leader. Instead, she combines elements of the two, speaking to her audience of “all immigrants” as their peer. She redefines immigrant identity in a way that moves beyond the logics of formal citizenship, and instead offers a cosmopolitan version of cultural citizenship in which everyone is an immigrant fighting against literal or metaphorical borders.

Ultimately, their contrasting use of personal narratives, dramatic tones, modes of empowering their audiences, and appeals to identification with their audiences in order to create disparate models of engagement with the public sphere point to “the central dilemma of emancipation: does one concentrate on making the escape or on denying that the escape needs to be made?”¹²⁴ As such, we saw how the three women approach emancipation from different and conflicting perspectives. This was made particularly obvious in the contrasting speeches of Leezia Dhalla and Rossy Evelyn Lima. Dhalla seeks emancipation from the label of “illegality,” but she does so by pleading for inclusion into the very system that upholds the logics of “illegality.” In contrast, Lima’s vision of emancipation and inclusion requires a recognition of citizenship as a discursive enactment that rejects dominant and normative definitions of deserving and undeserving immigrants. Nevertheless, both women refuse to protest the institution of formal citizenship and its embedded exclusionary logics and practices.

In the years since DACA was introduced, many immigrant-rights leaders and organizers realized that the narrative themes of innocence, achievement, and assimilation

were counterproductive and scapegoated other “less-deserving” undocumented immigrants. In response, DREAMers reoriented their focus, continued to share their stories, but stressed that they would not villainize their parents or other “less-deserving” undocumented immigrants.¹²⁵ However, Fanny Lauby observes that, even though the narrative of the “perfect DREAMer” has become a source of tension for activists, it nonetheless remains “at the center of mobilization for immigrant rights.”¹²⁶ The three DREAMer discourses examined here similarly reveal that undocumented immigrant youth have not always made the “drastic shift” in departing from the themes of assimilation, achievement, and innocence, and even when they have, the shift has complicated the political agenda of the DREAMer movement.¹²⁷ Their disparate enactments of cultural citizenship illustrate that personal liberation and empowerment don’t always create coalitional potential as undocumented youth continue to define inclusion and belonging in different ways.

In September 2017, President Donald Trump announced that he was formally putting an end to the DACA program, which had provided temporary relief from deportation to nearly 800,000 undocumented youth.¹²⁸ Even though a federal judge ruled against Trump’s decision to rescind the program, calling it “arbitrary and capricious,” the future of undocumented immigrant youth in the United States remains less than certain.¹²⁹ In light of these recent developments, my analysis in this chapter illustrates some of the internal challenges and contradictions of the still-nascent DREAMer movement. The speeches of the three undocumented immigrant women illustrate valuable efforts to create discursive space and political subjectivity for DREAMers. They also present compelling arguments for inclusion, but the different ways undocumented

immigrant youth define belonging, their immigrant identity, and their position in relation to formal citizenship point to an inability to overcome conflicting interests and goals, and an inability to organize around a coherent political position.

From an organizing perspective, Lauby is right to point out that activists must “pay attention to tension created by the degree of exclusivity of the narratives they use and the need to expand their coalition of support.”¹³⁰ As the political debates about undocumented immigration continue, the movement of DREAMers would need to go beyond the affective dimension of storytelling and organize around a coherent plan of action against a political regime determined to deport them and their families. In the process, DREAMers would also need to address the internal disparities and challenges arising from their dual identities, politically as DREAMers and culturally as Americans, and the competing understandings and embodiments of citizenship that this dual identity invites.

Chapter 5: (Re)Defining American: Intersectionality and Coalition Building in the
Decolonial Rhetoric of Jose Antonio Vargas

In June 2012, the cover of *Time* was a picture of more than a dozen undocumented immigrants with the headline “We are Americans* *Just not legally.”¹ At the center of the image was Jose Antonio Vargas, a person who has become the unofficial face of the undocumented immigrant community since he revealed his identity as an undocumented immigrant on the cover of *The New York Times Sunday Magazine* in June 2011. Since then, Vargas has enjoyed the public and media spotlight as an advocate for immigrant rights and as someone who was open about his lack of immigration documents. Instead of hiding from U.S. immigration authorities, Vargas has stepped into the public spotlight, traveling across the country, speaking on college campuses, appearing on national TV and radio shows, and starting his own media outlets, Define American and #EmergingUS, and producing the annual Define American Film Festival.²

For all his public activity, Vargas has received little attention from U.S. immigration authorities, despite a brief traffic arrest in Minnesota in 2012 and a short detention in Texas in 2014.³ A partial explanation of Vargas’ ability to avoid deportation is his established reputation as a successful and celebrated journalist, making his potential removal a threatening contradiction to long-celebrated myths of the United States as an entrepreneurial nation of immigrants. At the same time, Vargas continues to live with the knowledge that U.S. immigration agents have the power and resources to detain and deport him at any moment. As such, Jose Antonio Vargas and his experiences as an undocumented immigrant in the United States represent the effects of the contemporary political situation around undocumented immigration, which villainizes immigrants as

“illegals” and polices their presence within U.S. borders. Even as U.S. political discourse continues to be defined by forceful rhetorics about the threat of undocumented immigrants and the need for their deportation, these same discourses continue to reflect the economic need to maintain a cheap, exploitable, and excludable population of undocumented workers. These reasons invite us to examine the rhetoric that has helped Jose Antonio Vargas achieve his status as a public figure and has positioned him as an advocate for immigrant rights.

In this chapter, I examine Jose Antonio Vargas’ keynote address at the 2016 National High School Journalism Convention held in Los Angeles, California. Speaking in front of an audience of high school students, Vargas delivered a critique of the common depiction of undocumented immigrants as “illegals” by the U.S. media and public, arguing that immigration has been a highly politicized issue that was poorly understood in contemporary U.S. culture. With the speech, Vargas seeks to spread awareness by outlining the nuanced circumstances of undocumented immigrants and by identifying key problems of contemporary U.S immigration politics. I approach this speech by Vargas as representative of his broader rhetorical project as an immigrant rights activist who travels across the nation to create awareness and protest dominant discourses about “illegal aliens.” Engaging in multimodal activism through public speeches, TV appearances, protest rallies, and producing documentaries, Vargas’ purpose is both informative and persuasive. On one hand, Vargas seeks to educate his audiences about the historical realities and myths about immigrants and the U.S. immigration system. On the other hand, Vargas seeks to inspire and persuade his audiences to start open and honest conversations about the role of race in influencing U.S. American

national identity and attitudes toward immigration. His 2016 speech at the National High School Journalism Convention encapsulates both, with Vargas calling on his audience of young aspiring journalists to realize their responsibility to report objectively and to humanize deeply politicized issues of identity, race, citizenship, and immigration in contemporary United States.

In analyzing Vargas' keynote address, I argue that Vargas engages in a practice of rhetorical *decolonialism*, through which he asks his listeners to reject the assumed U.S. American cultural and sociopolitical homogeneity and to instead see the nation as an always-already fragmented product of the movement of people and cultures throughout history.⁴ In part, his decolonial efforts are grounded in his identity as a Filipino immigrant. The colonial history and role of the United States in the Philippines that I presented in Chapter 2 make Vargas' circumstances slightly different from those of immigrants from Mexico and Central America. Nevertheless, I argue that Jose Antonio Vargas engages in an inclusionary project that aims to challenge and redefine dominant thinking about citizenship as a necessary step to the inclusion of immigrants. Doing so, I respond to Karma Chávez's criticism that "projects of inclusion don't rupture oppressive structures; instead they uphold and reinforce those structures by showing how they can be kinder and gentler without actually changing much at all."⁵ Although I agree with her assessment generally, I put forward the rhetoric of Jose Antonio Vargas as an example of an inclusionary rhetorical project that takes an intersectional approach to citizenship as an attempt, indeed, to make the structure kinder and gentler, but not without disrupting and changing its oppressive norms. Vargas's rhetoric illustrates an exception, showing that it is possible to engage in inclusionary rhetorics that destabilize and rewrite the institution

of citizenship, moving it away from its norm as a bureaucratically ascribed status and instead making it account for the cultural aspects and historical context of people's lived realities.

As a result, his rhetoric offers a viable attempt to decolonialize U.S. American national identity and citizenship by reconstituting the subject position of "American" and disrupting the subject position of "illegal." Labels such as "American" and "illegal" have both divisive and unifying potential, as well as discursive power to affect how people are represented and subjectified.⁶ Subjectivity, as Kendall Phillips explains, "is always a tension between the positioning carried out by the formations of discourse within which we act and the fluid multiplicity of subjectivity against which such positions are employed."⁷ The subjectivities of "American" and "illegal" function rhetorically as allegedly fixed subject positions, inviting the fluid and multiplicity subjects they encompass either to identify or *disidentify* from the established norms and fixity of the position. Judith Butler clarifies: "it is not the case that a 'subject-position' preexists the enunciation that it occasions, for certain kinds of enunciations dismantle the very 'subject positions' by which they are ostensibly enabled."⁸ Subjectivities then become the rhetorical playground for people to form unity through identification, or to create division through *disidentification*.⁹

My analysis illustrates how Jose Antonio Vargas engages variations of the strategies of identification and disidentification with the subjectivities of "American" and "illegal" in what Alessandra B. Von Burg calls the "*renovation* of citizenship to reimagine citizenship for noncitizens," which "repositions the story of the United States as a nation of immigrants by connecting this familiar metanarrative to recent immigrants'

stories of mobility.”¹⁰ Von Burg’s proposal represents a decolonializing effort to reposition “citizens and noncitizens, long-term residents and newcomers, documented and undocumented migrants, on a horizontal level, not a vertical hierarchy,” thus allowing for a new understanding of immigration “as the rights and freedoms to move, and the rhetorical implications of a new language, a new vocabulary that describes *everyone* as mobile.”¹¹ Jose Antonio Vargas seeks to achieve just that, as he urges his listeners to challenge the ways in which the neocolonial conditions of U.S. American citizenship and identity produce the normative subjectivities of “American” and “illegal.” Instead, Vargas advocates the reconceptualization of what it means to be an American, asking his listeners to see citizenship as a coalitional subjectivity defined by the interrelation of “agency, experience, and consciousness.”¹² As such, Vargas’ rhetorical project disrupts the asserted existence of “American” as a political and cultural subjectivity that is always already interpellated through processes of identification in rhetorical narratives that presumes its constitution.¹³

Despite what may appear to be casual imprecision on my part, the terms neocolonial, decolonial, and postcolonial have distinct and important functions in my analysis. All three terms are rooted in the framework of colonialism, warranted and defined by the history of the United States both as a British Colony and as a colonial force that displaced indigenous people and engaged in colonial occupation that influenced the migration of peoples across nations and territories. The three terms respond to this history and to the legacy of colonialism in the contemporary United States even after the end of formal colonial rule. As a cultural phenomenon,¹⁴ postcolonialism is a phase “characterised by the persistence of many of the effects of colonisation, but at the

same time their displacement from the coloniser/colonised axis to their internalisation within the decolonised society itself.”¹⁵ Raka Shome similarly explains that the term “postcolonial” allows us to think through the problematics and effects of colonialism, suggesting that there was never a complete rupture from formal colonial relations and politics, and that contemporary political, economic, and cultural relations continue to be defined by the conditions of neocolonialism.¹⁶ Thus, neocolonialism is not a new form of colonialism; instead, it describes the evolution of colonial politics and relations in a postcolonial phase brought about by formal decolonizations. In this context, the term “decolonial” describes *actions* and *rhetorics* that seek to disrupt the neocolonial *conditions* that exist in a postcolonial *age*. I approach Jose Antonio Vargas’ activism as a persuasive effort to decolonize the neocolonial norms that circumscribe contemporary thinking about U.S. citizenship and national identity. His goal is to decolonize the two, urging his listeners to adopt a postcolonial orientation that allows them to realize the legacy and effects of colonialism on contemporary U.S. sociopolitical and cultural dynamics. Before I show how Vargas achieves this rhetorically, I overview the historical context of his speech, and the exigencies to which his rhetoric responds.

Historical Context and Exigencies

By the time Jose Antonio Vargas delivered the keynote address at the 2016 National High School Journalism Convention, the U.S. public had become well-acquainted with DREAMers and their rhetoric. The push for comprehensive immigration policy reform in 2013 received much attention from the U.S. media and public. Throughout the past decade, undocumented immigrants came out of the shadows, staged protests, organized marches, delivered TED talks, and even interrupted speeches by

President Barack Obama.¹⁷ Even as they continued to speak from the margins, they became members of the public sphere and the national discourse on immigration. In the previous chapter, I examined characteristics of DREAMer discourses, and I showed how, despite their coalitional potential, they often pulled immigration and citizenship discourses in different directions. Nonetheless, their rhetoric helped to inspire favorable attitudes toward the “deserving” DREAMers. In June 2012, President Barack Obama announced the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program as a temporary protective measure against the deportation of DREAMers.¹⁸ In 2016, a Gallup poll discovered that 84 percent of U.S. adults favored a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants who meet certain criteria. The same poll discovered that 66 percent of U.S. adults oppose the deportation of immigrants living without authorization in the United States and that 66 percent of U.S. adults opposed the construction of a wall at the U.S.-Mexico border.¹⁹ Other polls revealed similar numbers, suggesting that a majority of the U.S. American public was in favor of allowing “deserving” undocumented immigrants a path to legalization and/or citizenship. In large part, undocumented immigrant youth accomplished this by rhetorically conjoining the disparate identities of being both DREAMers and Americans, which naturalized “the value of the American Dream myth.”²⁰ But as my analysis in the previous chapter showed, this dual identity also created disparate and conflicting challenges to how DREAMers engaged U.S. cultural citizenship as they appealed for their inclusion.

The notion of the “deserving” immigrant, however, was not a new product of DREAMer activism, as achievement and responsibility had long been established as cultural hallmarks of the “good” immigrant.²¹ Indeed, U.S. national discourse on

immigration, as directed by presidents in past two decades, has been characterized by the embrace of exceptional, economically-responsible and productive, and culturally-assimilated immigrants.²² Specifically, both President George W. Bush and President Barack Obama presented the United States as both a nation of immigrants and a nation of laws, welcoming the inclusion of “deserving” immigrants as a neoliberal economic good.²³ In particular, President Barack Obama’s administration made an effort to liberalize immigration enforcement when, in 2011, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Director John Morton issued two memoranda “which encouraged immigration officials to use their discretion in immigration enforcement to prosecute criminal or high-threat immigrants rather than those with families or economic ties in the United States.”²⁴

Despite the alleged liberalization of immigration enforcement and favorable attitudes toward segments of undocumented immigrants perceived as “deserving,” a majority of the U.S. public and media continued to be preoccupied with narratives of border protection and the threat of unauthorized immigration. As Claudia Anguiano observes, “circulated in local and national media, reflected in policy discussion, and referenced in public commentary,” the term “illegal alien” and “illegal immigrant” predominate in the contemporary discourse about U.S. immigration.²⁵ Some saw President Obama’s actions on DACA as ignoring the rule of law, and offering amnesty to people who had broken U.S. immigration law.²⁶ In the summer of 2014, conservative media outlets ramped up fears about an “invasion” of “illegal” immigrant women and children from Central America across the U.S.-Mexico border.²⁷ Texas Governor Rick Perry and border militia groups called for the deployment of the National Guard to

protect the country from this “invasion” of “illegals.”²⁸ On his part, and despite his magnanimous rhetoric about immigration, President Barack Obama had deported more undocumented immigrants than any previous president by the end of his two terms in office.²⁹ Immigrant rights leaders eventually gave Obama the moniker “deporter-in-chief.”³⁰

Further fueling anti-immigrant sentiment, in 2015, then-presidential candidate Donald Trump reignited xenophobic attitudes toward Mexican immigrants as “rapists and murderers,” building his campaign on a promise to build a wall at the U.S.-Mexico border.³¹ His campaign tapped into a powerful fear of the “illegal alien” as one who takes advantage of U.S. citizens and the institution of U.S. citizenship. Throughout his campaign, Donald Trump re-popularized the phrase “illegal alien,” and once elected, he rescinded the DACA program.³² Reversing a lot of the progress made by his predecessor and the DREAMer movement, Donald Trump’s rhetoric and policies revealed not only that the victories of undocumented immigrant activists were short-lived, but also that the celebratory narratives of the “deserving” DREAMers and the themes of innocence, achievement, and assimilation had made little impact on the U.S. public’s obsession with the rule of law and the citizen-alien binary.

Since coming out as an undocumented immigrant in 2011, Jose Antonio Vargas has been a vocal advocate for immigrant rights, as he traveled across the United States urging audiences to understand that no person can be “illegal.” His efforts and those of activists in the “Drop the I-Word” online campaign resulted in the Associated Press dropping the phrase “illegal immigrant” from its stylebook in 2013.³³ Speaking in early 2016, Jose Antonio Vargas responded to the shifting tides in U.S. public opinion. His

speech was simultaneously a reaction to the emergence of Donald Trump's candidacy for president, the disappointing lack of legislative progress during Barack Obama's presidency, and the growing discontent and racist animus of white Americans, who saw minorities and undocumented immigrants as enjoying an unfair advantage in U.S. society. Vargas' speech was also a reaction against the condition of inclusive-exclusion, unintentionally created by some DREAMers and by activists like Enrique Morones, who either utilized the narrative themes of assimilation, achievement, and innocence, or advocated for limited and, inevitably, marginalized inclusion through documentation. Against these powerful and competing rhetorics, Vargas spoke in an effort to redefine and decolonize dominant understandings of the "American" subjectivity. Rather than argue for the inclusion of undocumented immigrants as deserving, Vargas instead asked his listeners to see how histories of immigration and race relations have come to define their own subjectivities and to realize their coalitional potential to reconstitute the U.S. American nation in a more racially equitable and inclusive way, one in which no person is seen as "illegal."

In the following analysis of Jose Antonio Vargas' speech, I approach his speech as an act of deliberative rhetoric that combines rational arguments and evidence with personal narratives that signal the material realities of individuals linked together in society. By constructing and performing a complex rhetorical persona, Vargas yields the power of his character to disrupt and decolonize dominant narratives and myths about U.S. immigration. My examination develops in three parts. First, I assess the way Jose Antonio Vargas embodied a rhetorical persona that illustrates how undocumented immigrants in the United States occupy a sociopolitical place defined by the nation-

state's economic interest to maintain a cheap, exploitable, and excludable workforce. Then, I examine the way Vargas' critique of "illegality" as a discursive frame reflecting racist tendencies and the U.S. nation's obsession with border enforcement. Finally, I conclude by analyzing Vargas' call to his listeners to engage in intersectional conversations about race, immigration, and identity that would create coalitional potential and empower them to (re)define "American" by disrupting and decolonizing the normatively homogenized notions of U.S. citizenship and identity.

"No Comment" – The U.S. Nation's Attitude Toward Undocumented Immigrant Labor

In his rhetorical act, Jose Antonio Vargas develops a complexly nuanced persona which allows him to disrupt dominant narratives of the United States as both a nation of immigrants and a nation of laws. His speech shares common discursive themes with the rhetoric of other immigrant-rights advocates. Like many DREAMer activists, Vargas begins by documenting his own experience of growing up as an undocumented immigrant, his gradual assimilation into U.S. American culture, and his efforts to earn his citizenship. He contextualizes his personal narrative in broader immigration discourses, documenting major problems and obstacles in contemporary U.S. immigration politics. Like other immigrant-rights activists, he attempts to educate and persuade his audience through historical facts and statistics, seeking to correct misconceptions about undocumented immigrants. Standing as a representation of undocumented immigrants in the U.S., Vargas displays how appeals for inclusion based on one's innocence, assimilation, and achievement are rendered futile by the U.S. nation-state's economic interest in continuously maintaining a population of cheap and exploitable laborers who

are never fully included in the national body. Through a combination of personal disclosures, facts and statistics, and rhetorical questions, Vargas illustrates how undocumented immigrants like him, despite their achievements, are subjected to the nation's interplaying attitudes of xenophilia and xenophobia.³⁴

Launching his critique, Vargas begins his speech with a personal narrative which documents his life as an undocumented immigrant in the United States. He situates himself within the grand narrative of the United States as a nation of immigrants, starting with the story of his arrival, when his mother in the Philippines sent him to live a better life with his grandparents in the United States. Vargas then recalls his awakening to the fact that he was an undocumented immigrant, when at the age of 16 he was told by a DMV official that his green card was fake. Confused and thinking he was “the only non-Mexican Latino person” in this situation, Vargas found a “way of existing” through writing for his high school newspaper:

My very naïve 17-year-old-self thought, wait a second, if I can be on the paper...if I can't be here because I don't have the right papers, what if my name is on the paper? Doesn't that mean I exist? Doesn't that mean that I am here, I am writing in English, I am talking to people, I am respecting them...right?³⁵

The story symbolizes the existential crisis and confusion of living as an undocumented immigrant in the United States. Furthermore, it marks Vargas' desire to prove his existence and belonging in his adoptive nation. Vargas continues his story, documenting his successes as a journalist, working for *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*, winning a Pulitzer award, interviewing high-profile celebrities like Mark Zuckerberg, earning a lot of money and living in New York City. His story effectively shows Vargas' attempt to be included in the nation of immigrants, embodying

the common narrative themes of immigrant youth who were innocently brought into the country by their parents, successfully assimilating into U.S. society, and seeking to contribute to their adoptive country. Furthermore, his story of success resonates with the “capitalist” and “communitarian” iterations of the “nation of immigrants” myth, with Vargas serving as an economic benefactor and contributing member of the national community. Vargas himself recalls his internalization of the myth of an immigrant nation, where hard work and assimilation were all that matters for one’s acceptance: “I had a conversation with myself and I thought, okay, if I can’t be a U.S. citizen because I don’t have papers, if I can’t be a U.S. citizen because I was not born here, maybe I should just check the box and try to earn it!”³⁶ Rhetorically, situating his story within the established frameworks of the myth of an immigrant nation helps Vargas to establish a persona relatable to other undocumented immigrants. By deploying the easily recognizable frames of immigrant innocence, assimilation, and achievement, Vargas becomes the embodiment of the “successful” immigrant, who is nevertheless unable to legalize his status or earn his citizenship.

Documenting his disillusion with the United States as a nation of immigrants that welcomes hard work and assimilation, Vargas then shares the story of his decision to come out as an undocumented immigrant and his experience with the United States as a nation of laws. Doing so, Vargas recalls the feeling of depression and futility, because despite his professional successes, he remained “the same person that people called ‘illegal’” and whose “circumstances are not different from the people who clean your houses, mow your lawns, and serve you drinks.”³⁷ His confession and realization complicates his persona in a way that invites his listeners to realize the limitations and

misconceptions perpetuated by narratives of innocence, achievement, and assimilation embedded in the myth of the United States as a welcoming nation of immigrants. Vargas calls on his audience to “challenge narratives like ‘good immigrant,’ ‘model minority,’ ‘all those Asian people, they study so hard’” because they perpetuate myths and stereotypes that do not accurately reflect the reality of U.S. immigration and race relations.³⁸ He shows that even when undocumented immigrants attempt to become the “good” immigrant who assimilates into U.S. culture and its institutions, they inevitably reach a glass ceiling, or a border, enforced by “illegal alien” discourses that make assimilation and enfranchisement an impossibility. Vargas illustrates how to be “illegal” means to occupy a unique sociopolitical position between the two myths of the United States as a nation of immigrants and a nation of laws. In his analysis of President Barack Obama’s immigration rhetoric, J. David Cisneros argues that stories of exemplary immigrants who embrace and embody the neoliberal themes of “entrepreneurialism, responsibility, and U.S.-style multiculturalism” are used to distinguish those worthy of inclusion into the “nation of immigrants” from those subject to the “nation of laws.”³⁹ Complicating this binary distinction, Vargas’ personal story exposes his unique position as an “illegal” who is subjected to U.S. enforcement and deportation practices *despite* his embrace of the neoliberal subjectivity as a hard-working and economically productive immigrant.

Further showing his early embrace of this neoliberal subjectivity, Vargas continues his story of coming out as an undocumented immigrant, recalling his expectation that U.S. immigration authorities would arrest and deport him. Vulnerability is thus added to his persona, creating further ground for identification between him and

other undocumented immigrants. The story of his coming out testifies to the reality of undocumented immigrants living as subjects of the United States as a nation of laws.

Vargas presents his willingness to take responsibility and his readiness to cooperate with U.S. immigration authorities:

I had just plopped myself on the cover of *The New York Times* Sunday magazine, and I am waiting. I had paid my credit card bills, I paid Best Buy, American Express, I had packed my stuff, because I'm like "Hey, maybe they will come after me." I had taken my money out of Bank of America and gave it to my grandmother to hide...all of that. But then no one from the government called! Stephen Colbert called. He said he wanted me on the show. Bill O'Reilly called he said, "Hey come to the show, I don't understand why they are not deporting you." I don't know why not, Bill!⁴⁰

In this passage, Vargas illustrates the peculiar role of the nation-state in maintaining the "inclusion through exclusion" of undocumented immigrants, keeping them under the constant threat of deportation, without actually deporting them or offering them a way to legalize their existence.⁴¹ Toward the end of his speech, Vargas further demonstrates this with the story of his 2014 arrest in Texas, noting: "I was only detained for 8 hours, because then the White House called and bailed me out. I didn't call them! But apparently it was too much trouble to arrest me and detain me, so they got me out."⁴² Instead of deporting him, U.S. immigration officials issued Vargas an alien arrest warrant that he was to carry with him at all times. The story shows the irony of the U.S. nation-state documenting Vargas' lack of immigration documents, but also symbolizes the power of the state to use the bureaucratic regime of documentation to police and control its subjects, even those that it may deem excludable.⁴³ Ultimately, Vargas' rhetorical persona, as both the successful journalist and the deportable alien, and as the undocumented person with documents, becomes a symbol of the peculiar state of the U.S.

immigration system, which fails to live up to the inclusive promise of the “nation of immigrants” myth, but at the same time is reluctant to enforce the responsibility embedded in its “nation of laws” counterpart.

Vargas’ critique culminates with a story about his interaction with the Department of Homeland Security, when he asked an U.S. immigration official whether or not they were planning to deport him. Perplexed and unsatisfied, Vargas elaborates on the official’s response of “No comment” and the metaphor it stands for:

That’s the metaphor for how most Americans think of us! So long as someone is babysitting your kids and mowing your lawns and serving you drinks...so long as someone is harvesting the tomatoes that end up on the In-N-Out burgers...so long as someone is doing the cheap labor that this country cannot seem to want to do, you are cool, no problem! I’m sorry, isn’t this a country built on the back of cheap labor? Free? Talk to black people about that! Who built the South? Talk to the Irish and the Chinese who built the railroads! No comment! No comment...It’s not your issue, it’s about the wall, it’s about Mexico, it’s about these people?⁴⁴

With this passage, Vargas launches a fierce criticism of the U.S. immigration system for the way it conveniently exploits the labor of undocumented immigrants. His argument is grounded in specific historic examples that illustrate the country’s dependence on immigrant labor, invoking the country’s shameful past and selective amnesia about the exploitation of Irish and Chinese immigrant labor and African-American slave labor in the 19th century. Vargas’ tone is forceful, showing his anger towards the collective “no comment” attitude of the U.S. nation toward the labor and contributions of undocumented immigrants. Effectively, Vargas responds to the “capitalist” iteration of the myth of an immigrant America, characterized by the interplay of xenophilia/xenophobia toward immigrants who either give or take from the U.S. economy.⁴⁵ Vargas exposes the peculiar position of undocumented immigrants at the

intersection of xenophilia and xenophobia, for they are neither welcomed (because they are seen as “illegals”), nor rejected (because their cheap labor is needed). Nicholas De Genova explains this peculiar process of inclusion through exclusion, noting that the “inclusion” of deportable immigrants “supplies a crucial feature of their distinctive, if disavowed, desirability - as labour for capital,” but only insofar that “their incorporation is permanently beleaguered with the kinds of exclusionary and commonly racist campaigns that ensure that this inclusion is itself, precisely, a form of subjugation.”⁴⁶

Vargas continues his criticism of the capitalist logics that inform the predominant “no comment” attitude of the U.S. nation toward the benefits of undocumented immigrant labor with a series of rhetorical questions:

Did you know that undocumented workers, people like me, have paid a hundred billion dollars into the Social Security fund in the past decade? A hundred billion dollars! . . . Isn't it fascinating that the government wants to deport us, but they keep wanting to collect the money? . . . Isn't it fascinating that these very people call us a bunch of criminals and illegals, when really we are actually the ones helping keep Social Security solvent?⁴⁷

His rhetorical questions are enthymematic, both signaling the answer but also encouraging the audience to seek answers themselves. The strategy of using rhetorical questions both educates the audience, but also seeks to disrupt the complicity embedded in their “no comment” attitude toward the benefits of undocumented immigrant labor. Seamlessly interweaving his persona of a “successful” immigrant with historic facts and statistics about the U.S. nation’s dependence and exploitation of undocumented immigrant labor, Jose Antonio Vargas establishes exigence for his listeners to question and examine the neocolonial conditions and politics of a legal and economic system that reaps the benefits of undocumented immigrant labor, but simultaneously subjects him and

other undocumented immigrants as exploitable and excludable “illegal” aliens. This leads to the second major aspect of his speech, in which Jose Antonio Vargas problematizes the dominant discourse of “illegal aliens” and its underlying politics of race.

Race and (Il)legality

Vargas’ second major rhetorical move is to show his audience the neocolonial conditions of contemporary U.S. immigration politics and the continued role of normative whiteness in defining who belongs legally in the U.S. nation. His resistance to the dominant legal/illegal discursive framework follows three counterargument strategies from the “Drop the I-Word” online campaign: “(a) ‘illegal’ as inaccurate, (b) ‘illegal’ as dehumanizing, and (c) ‘illegal’ as racist.”⁴⁸ Combining the first and third strategies, Vargas begins by criticizing the racist and inaccurate tendency of U.S. public and media to reductively simplify discourses about undocumented immigrants by conflating Mexican immigrants with “illegal aliens.” He laments the failure of U.S. mainstream media to represent the diversity of the issue, recalling how “in the media, when I was growing up in the mid-1990s, whenever people talked about ‘illegal people’ or ‘fake papers’ or immigration the media always said Mexican people.”⁴⁹ Criticizing the media’s preoccupation with Mexican immigrants as “illegal aliens,” Vargas argues that “we are so busy calling people names, and we are so busy politicizing this issue, that we actually have not reported the facts.”⁵⁰ He then informs his audience of the fact that “there are actually more Americans going to Mexico than Mexicans going to the United States,” and that “40 percent of the undocumented population of this country overstayed their visa...they didn’t cross the border.”⁵¹ Vargas introduces these facts and statistics to ironically poke fun at border protection narratives and to reveal the need for more

nuanced and more accurate reporting on the topic of immigration. Attempting to further disconnect the stigma of Mexican immigrants as “illegals,” Vargas points to the cover of *Time* magazine featuring his essay, listing the national origins of the undocumented immigrants standing next to him, arguing: “That cover right there represents the diversity of this issue that the mainstream media for the most part has completely, and utterly, and irresponsibly ignored.”⁵² Vargas uses a combination of personal narratives, facts, and visual representations to rhetorically correct the dominant misconception that most undocumented immigrants come from Mexico. The Pew Research Center estimates that, in 2014, the number of Mexican immigrants was 5.8 million, representing nearly “half of the nation’s 11.1 million unauthorized immigrants.”⁵³ The center additionally reports that “the number of unauthorized immigrants from nations other than Mexico has grown since 2009, from 5 million that year to 5.4 million in 2015.”⁵⁴ Going beyond fact-checking and correcting misconceptions, Vargas sheds light on often ignored segments of undocumented immigrants from different national origins, who are nonetheless subjected to the U.S. immigration enforcement dragnet and are lumped together by the media and public as “illegals.”

Vargas calls on his audience to resist the temptation to call people “illegal,” but instead to ask questions regarding the causes of their illegal status. Speaking as an undocumented immigrant from the Philippines, he explains the reason that large numbers of Filipino immigrants move to the United States: “we are here, because you were there, Spanish-American War, remember? When the Philippines became a protectorate of the United States like Puerto Rico?”⁵⁵ Though a series of rhetorical questions, he provokes his audience to question the causes of immigration to the United States:

What does U.S. foreign policy and U.S. trade agreements have to do with migration patterns? Why do people move? When all those Central American refugees two summers ago started walking from Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala to get here – who sold those Central American countries the guns? Who started the drug war? What did NAFTA do, not only to the United States, but to Mexico?⁵⁶

Shifting the focus away from immigrants' unauthorized presence in the United States, Vargas instead asks his listeners to question the U.S. history of colonial expansion and economic foreign policies. In his assessment of the connections between NAFTA and Mexican migration, Bill Ong Hing notes that "NAFTA has left the United States and Canada with a neighbor to the south that has a broken economy that loses more and more ground each day," elaborating that "the economic challenges Mexico faces are directly linked to policies that have been supported by the United States, U.S. corporations, or institutions supported by the United States."⁵⁷ Furthermore, Kevin Johnson explains that the U.S. is directly implicated in the surge of undocumented migration after the passage of NAFTA in 1994, as the U.S. deliberately "excluded the subject of labor migration from the bargaining table."⁵⁸ Vargas hints at this history with his rhetorical questions and with his criticism of the U.S. nation-state's continuous need for cheap labor.

Acknowledging the sovereign right of countries to protect their borders, Jose Antonio Vargas nevertheless continues his critique of the dehumanizing nature of the phrase "illegal alien," arguing that actions are illegal, but not people. He uses his own personal circumstances to expose the flawed logics of (il)legality, noting: "I am here illegally, I as a person am here illegally, the Border Patrol people can come here right now and arrest me if they wanted to. But I as a person am not illegal. Because people can't be illegal."⁵⁹ His argument reflects Kevin Johnson's observation that the phrase "illegal alien" is an erroneous and factually incorrect way that modifies the person to

which it is attached.⁶⁰ In support of this argument, Vargas notes that the term “illegal alien” is both imprecise and dehumanizing, standing in the way of the actual facts of immigration. More importantly, he criticizes the regime of immigrant “legality” and “illegality” as problematically inadequate when talking about citizenship and immigration. Effectively, Vargas’ critique targets a discursive regime defined by what De Genova defines as the hegemonic body of U.S. immigration law in which “pre-emptive and categorical stipulations of migrant ‘illegality’ tend to be reified as always already established, immutable, and unquestionable.”⁶¹ Using historic comparisons, Vargas presents his audience with a poster that shows the moral disconnect between justice and the law: “Apartheid was legal, The Holocaust was legal, Slavery was legal, Colonialism was legal, Legality is a matter of power, not justice.”⁶² In the context of U.S. citizenship and immigration, Vargas informs his audience that according to the first laws about citizenship in the United States, “the only people who could be American citizens were free white people,” and that “it wasn’t until 1924 that Native Americans were given citizenship rights.”⁶³ Furthermore, he mentions the “anti-German, anti-Italian, anti-Irish hatred that was actually very, very popular in this country when all those European immigrants first got here,” adding that Irish immigrants were not considered “white.”⁶⁴ Engaging the histories of U.S. race relations and immigration, Vargas strategically links the historic racialization of African-American slaves, Irish and Chinese railroad workers, to the contemporary racialization of Mexican immigrant workers as “*these people*.” Doing so, Vargas exposes the connection between the “illegal” subjectivity and the racialized aspects of U.S. citizenship with its tendency to (re)center whiteness as its normative condition. Whiteness as a normative condition of U.S. citizenship has a

complex rhetorical dimension that often allows it to work implicitly through allegedly “colorblind” neoliberal discourses of economic self-sufficiency and productivity that (re)center whiteness through “markers of class, nationality, and culture.”⁶⁵ Whiteness also works as a strategic rhetoric, allowing the nation-state to sometimes incorporate Irish immigrants and other immigrants of color as the exceptional “good immigrants” into the normative whiteness of U.S. citizenship.⁶⁶

Even so, whiteness as a strategic rhetoric of U.S. citizenship seeks to downplay the prejudices of the nation-state toward racial difference, instead casting sociopolitical and cultural exclusions as the result of illegal acts. Through his speech, Vargas urges his listeners to see how illegality functions discursively as a marker of difference that, ironically, fails to recognize differences among those that it marks. His arguments expose how the allegedly colorblind label “illegal” functions to uphold the normative powers of whiteness while, at the same time, erases differences among immigrants of differing and disparate circumstances. Illegality functions as an allegedly colorblind discursive tactic that displaces and obscures the racializing logics embedded in U.S. immigration law.⁶⁷

Speaking from personal experience, Vargas laments the fact that his Filipino mother, whom he hasn’t seen for 23 years, is not allowed to “get a tourist visa, because she is not a college graduate and she doesn’t own property,” adding that “if she were a French woman, and she wanted to go see *Hamilton* over the weekend in New York, all she would have to do is buy a plane ticket, and before you know it she is in New York.”⁶⁸ He contrasts the hypothetical French woman’s freedom to visit the United States whenever she pleases with the experience of immigrants from “third-world countries” who are placed on decades-long wait-lists for visas. In another example from personal

experience, Vargas laments how during his arrest in Texas, he was detained in the same cell as 6 to 14-year-old kids from Central America, who had crossed the U.S.-Mexico border to escape violence in their home countries. Through his examples, Vargas urges his listeners, “don’t talk to me about immigration not having to do with race and class and globalization,” asking them to see how race and national origin influence U.S. immigration politics in ways that simultaneously privilege normative whiteness and homogenize the unwelcomed and undesirable Other.⁶⁹

To complete his critique of the racializing logics embedded in the discursive regime of immigrant “legality” and “illegality,” Jose Antonio Vargas uses two stories that link the contemporary plight of “illegal” immigrants who seek to become documented and the historic legal oppression of black people. Vargas recalls an interaction with a young black man from the audience who said:

“Mr. Vargas, you know I’m really conflicted, I want you to be an American citizen, I think you’ve worked hard for it, but I’m conflicted because I was born here, my family is here, we helped build this country, they were from the South and they migrated to the North, the great migration of black people...I’m conflicted because I don’t know if I want the citizenship for you that I can’t even have myself. As a black man in this country sometimes I don’t feel that I’m treated as a citizen.”⁷⁰

The young man’s testimony shows Vargas and his listeners the racialized dimensions of the “American” subjectivity, and the way the dominant norm of whiteness continues to marginalize and exclude black people from citizenship, long after the abolition of slavery. Vargas follows up with a story of a similar interaction with an elderly black woman who asked him:

“Mr. Vargas, I saw you on Rachel Maddow Show and I thought it was really interesting that you are talking about how your life is subjected to pieces of papers, because you know my great-great-grandmother came to

this country, landed in Charleston, SC, was given a piece of paper, called a bill of sale, saying that she is a slave. So, can you connect the dots between the papers that my great-great-grandmother was given and the papers that you can't seem to get?"⁷¹

The woman's story was a critique of the bureaucratic practice of documentation. Showing how legal documents once subjected people as slaves, she asks Vargas, and by extension, his listeners, to interrogate how the nation-state can exert control over people through practices of documentation and, thus, challenges the desire of DREAMers (Chapter 4) and activists like Enrique Morones (Chapter 3) to become documented.

The two interactions once again hint at the colonial history of the United States and the neocolonial conditions of contemporary U.S. citizenship that perpetuate the racialization and marginalization of black people. Alongside his other examples, they help Vargas illustrate how U.S. citizenship has been historically racialized as "a process that has systematically privileged (monied, heterosexual, able-bodied, Protestant) whiteness and systematically oppressed persons of all other colors."⁷² Calling on his listeners to see the complex intersections between U.S. law, the politics of race, and the politics of immigration throughout U.S. history, Vargas ultimately urges them to decolonize U.S. national identity by adopting an intersectional approach, realizing their coalitional potential and collectively redefining U.S. American identity and citizenship.

Intersectionality and the Coalitional Potential to (Re)Define American

Even as Jose Antonio Vargas' rhetoric shares some similarities with DREAMer rhetorics, it also departs from them with his critique of the racializing logics and neocolonial conditions embedded in the label "American" as a signifier of national belonging. By documenting his experience and frustration with a sociopolitical stalemate

characterized by border protection and deportation narratives, Vargas is able to realize and argue that the root of the problem is the U.S. nation's inability and unwillingness to confront its colonial past and to assess the role of race in normative definitions of U.S. American identity and citizenship. Instead of explicitly advocating U.S. immigration policy reform, Vargas seeks to persuade his audience of the need to figure out how to respond to the changing demographics of the U.S. nation. He argues for a need to form coalitions that simultaneously reflect the increasing diversity of the nation but also respond to the anxieties of a shrinking white majority.

Several times during the speech, Jose Antonio Vargas states his major purpose, asking his audience to start more honest conversations about race, immigration, and identity in the United States. Effectively, Vargas argues the need for an intersectional approach to this conversation, clearly seen in the following passage:

When I travel around the country, what I realize is, I cannot only talk about immigrant rights and not connect it to all the other issues we are grappling with. I can't talk to you about immigrant rights and not talk about LGBTQ rights . . . I can't talk to you about LGBTQ rights and not talk about women's rights . . . and not talk about income inequality among all the races – White, Black, Asian, Latino . . . I can't talk to you about immigrant rights and not talk about Black Lives Matter.⁷³

Vargas presents an argument about the intersectional nature of personal and national identity, pointing to the coalitional potential among people subjected to similar, yet different, problems of postcolonialism. As defined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, the idea of intersectionality “highlights the need to account for multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed.”⁷⁴ In his speech, Jose Antonio Vargas highlights the need for intersectionality, as he pushes his audiences to interrogate the neocolonial norms of U.S. American citizenship and identity. Crenshaw clarifies that a

commitment to intersectionality does not seek to erase or transcend difference, but instead seeks to account for the ways in which difference can become “the source of social empowerment and reconstruction.”⁷⁵ Notably, through examinations of LGBTQ and immigrant rights activist groups, Karma Chávez cautions that lack of recognition of intersectional differences within the broadly encompassing and diverse group of undocumented immigrants, may lead to internal tensions and conflicts.⁷⁶ In his speech, Jose Antonio Vargas calls on his audience to adopt intersectionality as a tool of resistance against the power of the phrase “illegal alien” to simultaneously mark difference and erase difference among those it marks. By calling on his audience to recognize the different and disparate experiences of immigrants based on their race, gender, sexuality, and national origin, Vargas effectively urges them to map out their intersecting materialities.”⁷⁷

Vargas’ rhetorical purpose in advocating such an intersectional perspective is to produce among his listeners what Aimee Carrillo Rowe calls “coalitional subjectivities.” For Carrillo Rowe, a coalitional subjectivity is an orientation which allows individuals to see connections among themselves through a politics of relation, which are more powerful than particular social locations an individual may occupy.⁷⁸ In Vargas’ case, he seeks to inspire his listeners to realize their coalitional subjectivities through their relation to the term “American.” When Vargas asks his listeners, “what does it mean to be an American,” he urges them to examine and interrogate overlapping social and political relations as a way to resist the neocolonial conditions of U.S. citizenship and immigration, upheld by normative discourses about “illegal aliens,” “model minorities,” and “the good immigrant.”⁷⁹ As such, Vargas does not completely reject the “American”

subjectivity, as his rhetorical appeal relies on his listeners' ability and willingness to identify with the term on their way to reconstituting it as a coalitional subjectivity.

Through his speech, Jose Antonio Vargas adopts an intersectional approach to rhetorically create an audience that is both diverse and unified. He unifies his audience, asking them to realize the fragmentary nature of the U.S. nation, but to also realize the coalitional potential of their intersectional interests. He calls on them to pursue a common goal of defining what an American is, asking them to resist and disrupt homogenized definitions of U.S. American identity and citizenship in ways that account for the history of cultural, racial, and ethnic diversity of the U.S. nation. Urging them to engage in honest and open conversations about race relations and identity, Vargas does not explicitly address his audience as U.S. citizens, as immigrants, or as immigrant-rights activists. Vargas creates an audience that is not defined by citizen-alien distinctions and, instead, is called to interrogate and disidentify from the "hegemonic identity categories" of "American" and "illegal alien."⁸⁰ However, in Vargas' rhetoric, disidentification is not the tool of the marginalized and disenfranchised to subvert and remake toxic identity categories that produce their social and political isolation.⁸¹ Vargas calls on both those who are marginalized (people of color and immigrants) and those who are in positions of social and economic privilege to interrogate and disrupt the neocolonial sociopolitical forces that have come to define the norms of belonging and inclusion in the United States. Blurring distinctions between citizen-alien, marginalized-dominant, Vargas rhetorically creates a second persona for his listeners, inviting them to see themselves as members of a coalition of cultural Americans with intersecting interests and goals. Situating himself as a member of the same ideal audience, Vargas asks the question

“Who do *we* want to be here, and why?”⁸² Doing so, he empowers his listeners with rhetorical and political agency to determine who belongs in America, taking agency away from the nation-state, and subverting the formal powers of nation-state citizenship.

Seeking to create coalitional potential among his listeners, Jose Antonio Vargas utilizes clips from his website #EmergingUS and from his MTV documentary “White People” that illustrate the growing racial diversity of the U.S. nation. Rhetorically, the videos reveal the fragmented nature of the U.S. nation, drawing attention to the coalitional potential of intersecting feelings of marginalization and shared feelings of belonging. By showing these videos, Vargas seeks to persuade his listeners to resist divisions established by hegemonic identity categories, and instead to engage in conversations about how race and culture inform the formation of identity. The first video from #EmergingUS shows Vargas traveling across the United States, asking people to define their identity and roots, and to explain how they feel about their own racial identities. The video shows a bricolage of different experiences, revealing a common thread of racial angst and feelings of marginalization, but also shared feelings of belonging in America. The second video shows different people’s reactions to binary oppositions of “good” and “bad” immigrants. The video illustrates the binary through Donald Trump’s divisive comments that invite “good” immigrants but simultaneously portray Mexican immigrants broadly as the “bad” immigrants: “When Mexico sends its people, they’re not sending their best . . . They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists.”⁸³ People’s reactions to Trump’s comments become models of resistance, showing how Vargas’ own listeners can challenge dominant narratives that uphold normative portrayals of people based on their national origin. The final video is a trailer

for Vargas' documentary "White People," showing the angst and frustration of white people in dealing with modern day U.S. racial sociopolitics. Collectively, the videos help Vargas illustrate the constitutive nature of nationhood and the agency of people in crafting national identity.⁸⁴ They also help support Vargas' claims that: 1) the United States is becoming more diverse than ever; and that 2) as a nation, the U.S. people are uncomfortable talking about race. Presenting the U.S. nation as constituted by people's sense of belonging, rather than the product of territorial borders and legal definition, Vargas calls on his audience to attend to the dynamic intersections of race, identity, and culture when defining who and what is American.

Supporting his call, Vargas introduces his audience to statistical census data about the increasing racial diversity across the United States, noting that 72% of women in Los Angeles are women of color, 51% of Californians under 55 are Latinx, and that "for the first time in American public schools, white students across the country are in the minority."⁸⁵ Vargas celebrates this increasing diversity, noting that "the country is only going to get gayer, more LGBTQ people will come out, it's only going to get blacker, browner, more Latino, more Asian... Women of all ethnic and racial backgrounds will continue and must break every possible barrier there is to break."⁸⁶ But his celebration is also a caution about the need to address the increasing anxiety of "straight white guys" who feel that they are subject to "reverse racism" as a newly disempowered minority.⁸⁷ Supporting his second argument, Vargas plays the trailer for "White People," showing the startling statistics that "nearly half of white young people feel that discrimination against white people has become as big of a problem as discrimination against people of

color.”⁸⁸ Rather than criticize and fact-check, Vargas instead validates their feeling of marginalization with his call to explore the roots of that feeling.

Situating the contrasting experiences of people in dialogue, Vargas presents an argument about the need to create bridges and coalitions among people of different racial identities. Doing so, Vargas emphasizes the need to reach across racial divides and established identity groups. First, he argues that white people need to be included in the conversation about diversity: “what happens is people of color talk amongst ourselves, we call it the Diversity Summit or something, and then we talk about you behind your back. We can’t do that anymore. That’s not going to get us anywhere.”⁸⁹ He warns his audience that “calling somebody racist, homophobic, and sexist that’s easy! Trying to understand, as a journalist, why people think and feel the way that they do, that’s a lot harder.”⁹⁰ Effectively, Vargas challenges his audience to resist the temptation to fight against the “illegal alien” moniker by counter-labeling people as “racist, homophobic, and sexist” and instead urges them to include white people in conversations about diversity, effectively creating coalitional potential across racial divides.⁹¹ Second, Vargas challenges white people to do their part in realizing this coalitional potential by interrogating the roots of their feelings of marginalization. He calls on them to resist the normative identification, “I’m American,” and instead to become aware of the ancestral past that defines their identity: “every American, in my opinion, must be able to answer three fundamental questions – where did you come from, how did you get here, who paid?”⁹² Urging white people to familiarize themselves with the colonial and immigrant history of the United States, Vargas asks rhetorically, “how can you ask me where I am from and how I got here, if you don’t know your own history,” adding forcefully: “if you

can't answer any of those questions, you can't call people 'illegal,' and you can't obsess over a border that you don't understand."⁹³ Rhetorically, Vargas asks white people to become aware of their social and economic position as the product of complex histories of U.S. immigration and colonialism. Doing so, he challenges them to face the reality of the shifting U.S. demographics where "white" is no longer the norm, and instead "we are all the norms, and the defaults, and the standards."⁹⁴

The two parts of his argument destabilize and fragment existing identity structures that uphold racial divides, as well as citizen-alien binaries. The fragmentation is made possible by adopting a postcolonial approach that interrogates the neocolonial conditions that perpetuate the racialization of citizenship and the dominant of normative whiteness in contemporary U.S. society. Vargas argues that the interruption is only possible through the realization of coalitional subjectivities across people of different races, identities, cultures, and national origins. Furthermore, Vargas calls on his audience of prospective journalists to "realize your incredible responsibility to help write a rough draft of this evolving American history."⁹⁵ He empowers his listeners with the agency to help moderate complex conversations about race, identity, and immigration, and ultimately to heal the wounds of the racial divide, by helping them realize their coalitional subjectivities as Americans. Vargas calls on his audience of prospective journalists to humanize the politicized topics of American identity and immigration through ethical and moral reporting, and thus decolonize the preconceived and normalized ideals of belonging and U.S. citizenship. In this strategy, racial difference is not erased; it is instead recognized in an equitable way for its role in defining who belongs in America and what defines American. Thus, "American" is disrupted as a normative label with

powers to define belonging and Otherness; it is instead recast as the always-already fragmented product of people's constitutive agency to define belonging through their coalitional intersections.

Conclusion

In the previous sections of analysis, I identified three rhetorically distinct projects in Jose Antonio Vargas' keynote address at the 2016 National High School Journalism Convention. First, I discussed how Vargas developed a rhetorical persona that allowed him to critique the "capitalist" iteration of the myth of an immigrant America and to expose the compromised sociopolitical position of undocumented immigrants through processes of "inclusion through exclusion" in the gap between the U.S. nation's conflicting attitudes of xenophilia and xenophobia.⁹⁶ Second, I analyzed his criticism of the discursive regime of migrant "legality" and "illegality" as a framework that obscures the racialized norms of U.S. immigration policy driven by whiteness as the strategic rhetoric of U.S. citizenship. Finally, I examined how Vargas rhetorically constructed an image of his ideal audience as one that adopts an intersectional approach to U.S. identity politics and one that helps decolonize and fragment the normative discourses and labels of being "American." Asking his listeners to realize their coalitional potential by engaging in conversations about race, culture, and identity, Vargas invites them to recognize the shifting demographics of modern-day United States and to form coalitions that reach across racial divides. Together, the three sections show Jose Antonio Vargas' rhetoric as an inclusionary project that radically departs from other rhetorical acts that rely on appeals for inclusion through immigrant assimilation or immigrant disidentification. His rhetoric seeks to disrupt dominant frameworks of the myth of an

immigrant nation, directly interfering with discourses that celebrate the achievements and assimilation of “good” immigrants and discourses that villainize undocumented immigrants as “illegal aliens.” Evaluated against the dominant discursive frames of the United States as a “nation of immigrants” and a “nation of laws,” Vargas’ rhetoric disrupts the logics of both, showing the material effects of their racializing logics on the lived realities of undocumented immigrants.

By challenging the notion of a homogenous U.S. nation that has agency to give its consent and determine which people to include or exclude from its body, Vargas reimagines citizenship as the deliberative practice of diverse individuals that live together in a society. Vargas’ rhetorical interruption of the dominant understanding of citizenship as status effectively takes Karma Chávez’s idea of coalitional potential a step further, showing the need to create coalitions among immigrant groups with intersectional needs and interests, but to also create coalitions between immigrants and citizens, reaching across to white U.S. citizens as potential coalitional partners. Ultimately, Vargas’ rhetorical project responds to Crenshaw’s call toward intersectionality and to Shome’s call toward postcolonial approaches to identity. Doing so, Vargas’ rhetoric recognizes difference, seeking to create bridges and coalitions among individuals with constitutive agency to redefine the meaning of “American,” without erasing the very differences that bind them together through the history of immigration in the United States.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

In the last three chapters, I examined three different strands of U.S. immigrant rights rhetoric and outlined their different approaches to citizenship. In the context of recent political developments, none of these rhetorics spawned what one might consider instrumental success. That is, none of the appeals for inclusion, decrease of border enforcement, or reframing of what it means to be “American” prompted changes to U.S. immigration policy and enforcement practices. Indeed, Donald Trump’s first year and a half as president of the United States was marked by continued attempts to enforce bans on immigrants from specific countries, attempts to increase enforcement at the U.S.-Mexico border, and a decision to rescind the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. All these events signaled the seeming failure of immigrant rights activism of the past decade. Despite national marches, sit-ins, protests, and TED talks, the DREAMers had failed to inspire lasting changes in immigration policy to facilitate their inclusion. Similarly, Enrique Morones’ pleading words for preventing the unnecessary deaths of migrants at the border fell on deaf ears, as both the Obama and Trump administrations repeatedly authorized and increased funding for border enforcement and policing. Even Jose Antonio Vargas’s efforts to decolonize and redefine the meaning of “American” were largely countered and negated by Donald Trump’s ambiguous-but-catchy “America first” and “Make America Great Again” slogans. By 2018, it appeared that undocumented immigrants and their allies had failed to produce measurable changes in policy or in sociocultural attitudes toward foreigners and immigrants.

But there is another side to this rather grim story. National polls in 2017 showed rare partisan agreement that undocumented immigrants currently living in the United

States should be allowed access to a path to legalize their status. Even conservative media outlets, such as Fox News, reported that “a record-high 83 percent of voters support setting up a system for all illegal immigrants who are currently working in the country to become legal residents,” with only 14 percent saying “deport as many as possible.”¹ Similar bipartisan agreement appeared in opposition to the construction of a border wall between the United States and Mexico. And while it is impossible to assess whether these positive attitudes toward undocumented immigrants are products of the specific speeches of the activists examined in this dissertation, we can ascertain that immigrant rights activism broadly has positively affected U.S. American attitudes at least toward the achieving, willing to assimilate, non-criminal DREAMers.

This is a rather peculiar summary of the contemporary attitudes and politics of U.S. immigration. Even as an increasing majority of U.S. Americans support a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants, the U.S. Congress and the U.S. president pursue a path toward restricting immigration, detaining and deporting undocumented immigrants, and ramping up enforcement measures at the U.S.-Mexico border. This seeming paradox is the most recent iteration of Bonnie Honig’s argument that xenophilia and xenophobia function concurrently, allowing the nation to use the immigrant as a symbol of national renewal and as a symbol of peril to the nation’s economy, familial and communitarian norms.²

Despite this paradox and despite the political stalemate surrounding immigration policy reform, it has become impossible to ignore the fact that undocumented immigrants in the United States have become a permanent fixture in U.S. society, economy, and politics. The subjectivity of “undocumented immigrant” has become tantamount to that of

a second-class citizen. As I have proposed in this dissertation, valuable insights about how this subjectivity is (re)produced and challenged can be drawn from examining the rhetorics of undocumented immigrants and their allies. In addition, these rhetorics provide insight into how the institution of U.S citizenship is one immigrants seek access to, at the same time that they are oppressed and marginalized by it.

My dissertation engages and extends J. David Cisneros' argument that immigrant activists use vernacular rhetoric to redefine the borders of citizenship and the national community.³ I examined the speeches of undocumented immigrants and their allies in an effort to better understand how vernacular rhetorics work in the context of the dominant discursive framework of the "nation of immigrants" myth and its accompanying logics. My three case studies compel us to reconsider dominant notions of citizenship. As others before me have pointed out, undocumented immigrants, through their activism and claims for inclusion, allow us to see the rhetorical dimensions of citizenship as an embodied practice.⁴ The three cases examined here offer a glimpse into the diversity of strategies, circumstances, and enactments of citizenship of undocumented immigrants and their allies. Ultimately, my case studies offered detailed examinations of appeals to belonging and strategies of identity-making that help us understand how a legally and rhetorically disenfranchised population has been able to enact forms of rhetorical citizenship even when they have no legal claims to formal citizenship.

In this concluding chapter of the dissertation, I provide a brief summary of my findings and arguments from the three case studies, interpreting their significance in the context of a political regime that increasingly polices the nation's borders and the presence of foreigners on U.S. territory. Politics aside, it has become impossible to

escape the material reality of the fact that millions of undocumented immigrants live and work in the United States, participating in local, regional, and national communities and economies. As such they have become de facto members of a nation that refuses to recognize their contributions and their assimilation into America's mythic melting pot. Furthermore, I identify questions that arise from the case studies regarding the concept of citizenship, and the practices of organizing and social activism in the 21st century.

The three case studies of my dissertation illustrated several ways in which undocumented immigrants and their allies approach the concept of citizenship. My examination revealed how some activists strategically appeal for marginal inclusion through documentation; other activists demand a path to citizenship as a strategy for inclusion; yet others rely on decolonizing rhetorics to redefine cultural and formal citizenship in the United States. Whereas the first two approaches work in diametric opposition, the third represents a middle position that reflects the impulse toward humane treatment of migrants and at the same time recognizes the importance of nation-state citizenship, but radically altering its form.

Before identifying and assessing these three strategies, I established the historical context for contemporary debates regarding the politics of immigration in Chapter 2. The chapter showed how over time U.S. immigration policy developed as a response to the ever-pressing question of how to deal with the influx and presence of foreign-born individuals on its territories. Rather than a regulatory mechanism to facilitate the migration of people and their transition into residents, U.S. immigration law, even in its early iterations, functioned more as an ideological apparatus that defined and restricted U.S. citizenship to white males of Anglo-Saxon origin. With such a narrow definition of

citizenship, the mythos of the “American Dream” introduced an irresolvable conflict between the narratives of the United States as a nation of immigrants and a nation of laws. The two narratives carried the concurrent attitudes of xenophilia and xenophobia, through which the immigrant is both a symbol of national renewal and celebration, and a symbol of fear and peril to the established norms of the community.

I discussed the ways through which the four iterations of the myth of an immigrant nation reflected the interplay of xenophilia and xenophobia.⁵ The chapter overviewed how practices of inclusion and exclusion responded to economic needs and desires to conserve Anglo-Saxon communal and familial norms, effectively creating and reinforcing normative whiteness as the condition of U.S. citizenship. Over time, these practices and policies produced a group of immigrants who were included solely because they were excludable. Immigrants who lacked official authorization to enter the United States, often pejoratively labeled “illegal aliens,” became a permanent mainstay in the U.S. polity. As Cisneros and others have observed, this production of illegality was closely tied to racist attitudes and perceptions of the Latinx body as un-American.⁶ Ironically and paradoxically, U.S. immigration law neither facilitated their inclusion, nor actively pursued their removal; instead it maintained their in-between status as people who provide a cheap and much-needed labor source, and who are permitted to live and work in the shadows with the constant fear of detention and deportation.

Following this discussion of how illegality was produced and attached to Latinx bodies, the chapter concluded with an overview of state and federal government efforts to control and restrict immigration across the U.S.-Mexico border in the late 20th and early 21 centuries. Increases in immigration enforcement and policing of immigrant

communities led to the emergence of new forms of immigrant rights activism in the 21st century. Tired of living in the shadows under constant fear of arrest and deportation, undocumented immigrants and their allies began to organize and protest their unjust treatment and their lack of access to any path to legal status or citizenship. The three chapters that followed presented three cases of immigrant rights activism, illustrating the breadth of the issue, the complexity of circumstances, and the conflicting demands of different groups of undocumented immigrants.

The competing rhetorical strategies illustrated in the three case studies suggest that the coalitional subjectivity established by undocumented immigrants and their allies over the last decade does not overcome internal conflicts, disparate goals, and different conceptions of belonging and citizenship among undocumented immigrants. Even as the activists highlighted in my dissertation can be broadly understood as working towards the same goals of protesting the exclusion of undocumented immigrants, their rhetorics showcase their three competing approaches as the: (1) appeal for marginal inclusion through documentation; (2) appeal for full inclusion based on an immigrant's embrace and embodiment of U.S. cultural citizenship; and (3) appeal for a decolonial reconstitution of the "American" subjectivity. Even though the three approaches share intersecting elements, their collective incompatibility offers insight into the relative failure of immigrant rights activists to inspire political change.

In Chapter 3 of the dissertation, I highlighted the rhetorical attempts of Border Angels leader Enrique Morones to humanize migrant border crossers and protest increases in border enforcement infrastructure. His rhetoric illustrates the strategy of appealing for the marginal inclusion of migrant workers and their families through

documentation. Using thanatopolitics, Morones shares stories of migrant deaths at the U.S.-Mexico border, appealing to his listeners to empathize with migrants in search for better economic opportunities or migrants who seek to reunite with their families, just like the prototypical Anglo-Saxon immigrants from northern Europe. Through interplaying strategies of contrast and consubstantiality, Morones promotes the idea of humane and incremental immigration policy reform which would allow migrants to come out of the shadows and work to provide for their families without fearing arrest or deportation. Notably, Morones' vision of inclusion precludes a path to citizenship, instead stressing the differential and marginal inclusion of migrant workers and their families as people who refuse to assimilate into the norms of the U.S. national community. Despite Morones' appeal to establish consubstantiality between present-day Latinx migrants and the prototypical immigrants from Northern Europe, his insistence that Latinx migrant workers and their families do not seek citizenship problematizes the historical allusion as it violates the established norm of the historic European immigrant who assimilates into U.S. American culture and society and abandons their Italian, German, or Irish identity. As such, the marginally included Latinx migrant that Morones portrays reinforces aspects of the "Latino threat narrative" premised on the belief that Latinx migrants do not seek to assimilate into U.S. American society.⁷ In the end, even as Morones protests the dominant perception of Latinx migrants as "illegals," and even as he advocates for their humane and just treatment, he nonetheless reifies the notion that Latinx migrants are not, and do not seek to become, full members of U.S. society. Positioned as such, migrant workers and their families remain at the margins of society where they can become "documented" and used for their economic services, without

enjoying or exercising the rights of democratic citizenship. Indeed, Morones attempts to sidestep the very concept of citizenship, advocating instead for the human right to move and migrate through the popular refrain that “no human being is illegal.”⁸

In the following Chapter 4, I examined the speeches of undocumented immigrant youth with different circumstances, backgrounds, and experiences. In my comparative analysis, I showed how DREAMers engage differently with the dominant narrative themes of immigrant innocence, achievement, and cultural assimilation.⁹ Their appeals for full inclusion through a path to citizenship are premised on their ability and willingness to embrace and embody norms established by the “nation of immigrants” mythic framework. As such, they do not radically disrupt the logics of nation-state citizenship. Even so, my analysis illustrates the diverse rhetorical strategies of DREAMers through the contrasting narratives of Leezia Dhalla and Rossy Evelyn Lima. Both women spoke in the discursive space created by Cristina Jiménez but presented radically different visions of belonging and citizenship. Whereas Dhalla embraces and embodies the appeal for cultural belonging as the assimilated, innocent, and achieving immigrant, Lima disrupts the normative image of the DREAMer. She promotes a more cosmopolitan approach to belonging without actively challenging the logics of formal citizenship. Lima nonetheless offers a glimpse into the possibility of rethinking the norms of formal citizenship, a charge which Jose Antonio Vargas takes on in his rhetorical campaign to redefine “American.”

My analysis of Vargas’ rhetoric in Chapter 5 showcases the decolonizing aspects of his efforts to redefine the “American” subjectivity. Understood as a decolonial project, Vargas’ rhetoric attempts to bridge the gap between formal U.S. citizenship and

“American” cultural citizenship. Vargas calls on his listeners to self-reflexively examine their definitions of belonging in a culture that prides itself on its immigrant roots. As such, Vargas calls on the inventional resources of the “nation of immigrants” and “American dream” myths to illustrate the gap between the lived and racialized reality of U.S. citizenship, and the promise of citizenship embedded in the nation’s founding documents. Crucially, Vargas rejects the appeal for inclusion used by other immigrants, offering his own life story as proof that no matter how successful, well-assimilated, or innocent an immigrant might be, the current system of U.S. immigration only allows undocumented immigrants to be temporarily and marginally included, but never fully welcomed into the U.S. nation. Instead, Vargas attempts to disrupt and decolonize dominant capitalist, communal, and familial iterations of the myth of the United States as a homogenous nation of immigrants. Decolonializing iterations of the myths, Vargas asks his listeners to become better attuned to U.S. national identity and citizenship as always-already fragmentary. In his model, citizenship moves away from status, and becomes the deliberative practice of individuals living together in a society.

Collectively, the three case studies form a bricolage of rhetorical strategies used by undocumented immigrants and their allies to protest legal and discursive regimes that position immigrants as “illegal.” As rhetorics of protest, they function as critiques of contemporary bordering practices. Just as the framework of immigrant illegality borders the civic imaginary, the rhetorics of undocumented immigrants and their allies seek to shift, redefine, or remove figural and material borders.¹⁰ My analysis offers a valuable insight into these complex processes, showing a lack of consistency and coherence in the ways undocumented immigrants and their allies protest the borders of national identity

and citizenship in the contemporary United States. Each case study spotlights viable and compelling rhetorical strategies that have helped undocumented immigrants establish a political voice and identity, even as they struggle collectively to coalesce around a coherent and consistent vision of political change.

The three case studies also illustrate the breadth of immigrant rights rhetoric, situating the contemporary political fight of undocumented immigrants in the long history of struggles for citizenship in the United States. They illustrate Asen's argument that citizenship can be recast as a discursive practice that can be enacted by non-citizens.¹¹ Lack of formal status complicates their enactment of citizenship, but it does not detract from their performance of quotidian acts of citizenship as members, marginalized or not, of the ever-expanding U.S. public sphere. To that point, their collective failure to inspire lasting changes in U.S. immigration policy, or the regime of documentation and citizenship as status, need not lead to totalizing conclusions. Perhaps, it is important to remind ourselves that women and Black people were once also excluded from U.S. citizenship and that, indeed, their struggles for recognition and inclusion did not inspire immediate sociopolitical or cultural changes either. By heeding lessons from previously marginalized groups, contemporary undocumented immigrants and their allies can learn how to make effective appeals of inclusion while avoiding the major pitfall of reifying the logics of the very regime and institutions that create their oppression and marginalization.

As I have shown in my dissertation, undocumented immigrants and their allies have, indeed, adopted rhetorical strategies from other previously marginalized groups. Specifically, I illustrated how DREAMers incorporate elements of feminine rhetorical

style as they rely on associative, dramatic, and narrative modes of development grounded in examples from personal experience, pleading with their listeners as peers, creating identification as a source of empowerment.¹² Other undocumented immigrants deploy the strategy of disidentification, used in the past by queer activists and, notably, by figures like Frederick Douglass and Malcolm X,¹³ as a way to critique dominant norms of governmentality and define their own subjectivities. By using the rhetorical histories of protest and activism in the United States as an inventional resource, undocumented immigrants further illustrate the rhetorical dimensions of citizenship.

In the broader historical context, the activism of undocumented immigrants and their allies in the 21st century is still in the early stages of development. Although innovative and laudable, their shift toward self-organizing needs to be understood as a product of necessity. Because of internal struggles, conflicting demands and visions of inclusion, and fights for representation, undocumented immigrants chose to distance themselves from the more traditionally-structured policy-driven immigrant rights organizations, such as NILC and FIRM. Refusing to accept legislative compromises, such as increases in border security or the partial inclusion of only those deemed “deserving,” immigrant activists began to form their own coalitions reflective of their diverse identities and circumstances.¹⁴ Responding to this development, Emily Ironside and Lisa Corrigan observe that the only way to subvert the state’s control over U.S. American identity and citizenship is “by rhetorically challenging Anglo-Saxon notions of nation, embracing difference and diversity as topoi of a new American identity, and redefining themselves beyond exclusionary nationalist rhetoric.”¹⁵ At the same time, they recognize the grim reality that until undocumented immigrants “obtain the protections afforded by legal

status, [...] they have few options beyond assimilationist rhetoric to fight for incremental change.”¹⁶ In addition to further reinforcing their argument, with my dissertation I have shown that these nascent coalitions of immigrants have not always effectively outlined a coherent course of action toward legislative change. Even as they have made laudable progress in their efforts toward better representation and recognition of diverse voices, they have diluted the political message of the larger movement they are perceived to represent. Perhaps ironically, in their efforts toward recognition and self-identification, undocumented immigrants have further entrenched their subjectivity as insiders to the U.S. public sphere, but as outsiders to its legal institutions. Furthermore, Donald Trump’s presidency ushered in a political era of renewed xenophobia and targeting of immigrants, creating new challenges for undocumented immigrant activists and their allies who now have to reflect and reassess their rhetorical strategies.

The intersection of the three cases in my dissertation has offered valuable insights into the different and disparate rhetorical strategies of undocumented immigrants and their allies. At the same time, the case studies have also pointed to paradoxes raised by their rhetorics. Perhaps, the biggest paradox lies in the fact that despite their successful appeals for public recognition, which produced a favorable attitude among a majority of U.S. people for establishing a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants, they have failed to inspire meaningful change in U.S. immigration policy or to upend the long-standing political stalemate around the topic. I suggest that one way to address this paradox is to reevaluate how we understand their rhetorical agency.

As Karlyn Kohrs Campbell reminds us, both speakers and texts have rhetorical agency, which is “linked to and effected through artistry or artfulness,” that is, the ability

of both speakers and texts to respond to the symbolic constraints of the context in which they appear.¹⁷ In other words, the rhetorical agency of immigrant rights advocates and their speech texts is defined and constrained by the form of their rhetorical acts. In itself, form is an important determining factor, because as both Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson observe, speakers craft their rhetorical acts as fitting responses to rhetorical situations, observing generic properties that situations invite or demand, and adhering to formal expectations of similar antecedent rhetorical acts.¹⁸ Even in the case of protest rhetorics, where speakers usually argue against an established norm, their speeches are constrained by formal and generic conventions. In my dissertation, I showed that despite their sometimes-radical ideas that challenge U.S. citizenship and immigration norms, immigrant rights activists have mostly adhered to the formal and generic expectations of the situation. Enrique Morones addressed the members of California's Latino Legislative Caucus following rules of decorum, time limitations, and the formal and generic expectations of personal testimony in front of a legislative body. In the speeches of three DREAMer women, we saw two distinct genres of address. With her keynote address at the United We Dream annual congress, Cristina Jiménez followed the formal expectations of the campaign rally genre, speaking to her supporter base, using *epideixis* to celebrate the worthiness of their efforts and their victories, motivating them to continue their fight as "dream warriors." Similarly, Leezia Dhalla and Rossy Evelyn Lima adhered to the formal constraints and norms of the TED Talk genre, despite the contrast of their positions and ideas.¹⁹ Finally, Jose Antonio Vargas adhered to formal and generic expectations of the campaign rally genre in his keynote speech at the National High School Journalistic Convention. Because of this adherence to forms and

genres, any claim about immigrants' failure to inspire policy change is as much an argument about their rhetorical efficacy as it is about the rhetorical efficacy of the forms and genres they represent. As Erin Rand argues, rhetorical forms are "materializations of institutional power" as they constrain and define the range of substantive and stylistic arguments a rhetor can make.²⁰ Kathleen Hall Jamieson provides a useful illustration of this constraint: "an institutional spokesman who draws his perceptions of his role from the traditions of the institution itself tends, for example, to feel generic constraints more acutely than does the rhetor not tied to a tradition-bound institution."²¹ In the case of undocumented immigrants, the distinction is often rendered irrelevant due to their desire to be included in the institution of U.S. citizenship and, as such, they become institutional actors, regardless of their lack of formal status. The institution of citizenship itself has been historically defined by the constant interplay of xenophilia and xenophobia embedded in the different iterations of the "nation of immigrants" myth. As my dissertation has shown, undocumented immigrants have successfully established their rhetorical presence in the U.S. public sphere by situating themselves along the norms and limits of the "nation of immigrants" mythic framework that circumscribes U.S. cultural citizenship. In the process, they have established the distinct, but nonetheless marginalized, subjectivity of the "undocumented immigrant." But their successes and progress have invariably been products of rhetorical acts constrained by forms that uphold and reify citizenship as both an institution and a regime of governmentality.

Because of these formal and generic limitations, the major question for immigrant rights activists and those of us who study their rhetoric becomes "what next?" How can undocumented immigrants and their allies overcome the current political stalemate and

the predicament of their status as insiders to the U.S. public sphere, but outsiders to its legal institutions? If their rhetorical forms are indeed governed by the institution of citizenship and the myth of a “nation of immigrants,” how can they break away from formal expectations while maintaining their appeal to legitimacy? Robert Asen has usefully suggested that we rearticulate citizenship as a discursive practice, but what are the kinds of discursive practices that challenge the primacy of citizenship as status and don’t merely subordinate themselves to it? And if all rhetorical forms are materializations of institutional powers, can *any* immigrant speech act actually challenge or disrupt those powers?

I do not mean to suggest that the rhetorical efforts of undocumented immigrants and their allies have been futile. On the contrary, I maintain that their coalition-building efforts and commitments to intersectionality and decolonialism represent important incipient steps in their fight for inclusion and reconstitution of the U.S. citizenship. Kent Ono and John Sloop famously noted that the borders of U.S. citizenship, both material and figural, are not rigid and that they, indeed, shift.²² With my dissertation, I have shown that although these borders are not rigid, they do not shift easily or quickly. Just as women’s rights and anti-slavery activists faced decades of institutional and cultural resistance to their demands for inclusion, undocumented immigrants face an uphill battle as they attempt to shift the rhetorical and material borders around U.S. citizenship. It is unclear whether the paradoxes of the U.S. immigration system would ever be resolved, especially after the February 2018 decision of the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services to eliminate the phrase “nation of immigrants” as a historic descriptor of the United States from its mission statement.²³ In the current climate of

political and cultural hostility toward immigrants, our sustained scholarly attention and postcolonial commitment to listen to the voices of those perceived-as-Other may yield crucial insights to guide future activism in the fight for the just and equitable realization of the “nation of immigrants” myth.

Notes

Chapter 1

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¹⁰ Ono and Sloop, *Shifting Borders*.

¹¹ DeChaine, "Afterword," 280.

¹² Karma R. Chávez, "Beyond Inclusion: Rethinking Rhetoric's Historical Narrative," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 101, no. 1 (2015): 162-172. [doi:10.1080/00335630.2015.994908](https://doi.org/10.1080/00335630.2015.994908).

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Chapter 3

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Chapter 5

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Chapter 6

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