Introduction

The Voice and Power of Undocumented Youths, an Unlikely Story

On May 17, 2010, four undocumented students occupied the Arizona office of Senator John McCain. This action was followed by a flurry of high-profile public actions around the country. Undocumented youths poured into the streets, occupied the offices of other leading politicians, filled up blogs and editorial pages with eloquent arguments, lobbied senators and White House officials, and worked their networks to gain the backing of some of the most powerful unions and rights associations in the country. Their immediate goal was to pressure the Senate to support the Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act (DREAM Act), which would have provided undocumented youths the legal right to stay in the United States. The youths, or DREAMers as they came to be known, were making a powerful demand for residency status, but they were also "coming out" and demanding that they be recognized as human beings who belonged in the country. They were "good" immigrants who deserved permanent residency status, but they were also human beings who had the right to a public and political life. No longer would they accept their fate silently. They were asserting their "right to have rights": the right to have a public existence in a country that had banished them to the shadows.[1]

These political assertions contrasted sharply with the situation of undocumented youths ten years earlier, when, as a political group, undocumented youths did not exist. There were no arguments, messages, or rhetoric to represent undocumented youths and their cause in the public sphere. There were no organizations to sustain their campaigns and interventions in public life. And there were few if any networks that allowed individual youths to connect to one another and create a sense of themselves as political beings. Though these youths did not exist as a coherent *political* group, they certainly existed as a distinctive category of immigrants. By 2000, more than one million children and youths found themselves in a similar situation because of their shared immigration status. That is, they had migrated to the United States without authorization when they were children and they grew up without legal residency. They faced similar childhood experiences, common constraints upon entry into adulthood, and shared feelings of deep disappointment when realizing the difficulty of achieving their dreams and aspirations.[2] In spite of their different class, ethnic, sexual, gender, and regional backgrounds, the immigration system imposed upon these individuals a similar experience and fate. This made them into a group that was distinct from other immigrants and nationals alike.

Individuals within this group not only shared common constraints and feelings of frustration, but also pursued similar strategies to find a place in the only country they knew as their home. As children, they had a constitutionally protected right to attend elementary and high schools.[3] School administrators were forbidden to ask for proof of legal residency or to discriminate on the basis of a student's residency status. School was a place of refuge where children did not have to think about their immigration status on a daily basis. As their "illegality" faded into the background, they had an opportunity to play, study, explore, consume, socialize, and cultivate aspirations "just like anybody else." Through these kinds of everyday activities, they had become a part of America, just as America was part of them. So, while they were Mexicans, Filipino, El Salvadorans, Chinese, and Colombian by origin, they also developed a strong sense of belonging to the United States. They became American.

As the children moved into adulthood, the constraints of their "illegality" became more apparent and burdensome. Many went straight to work after high school. The lack of either a work permit or a social security number consigned most of them to precarious and low-paying work. The young adults who went to college struggled to find the means to do so. In many states, undocumented college students did not have access to in-state tuition and were denied the right to apply for financial aid. Many chose to go to less expensive community colleges rather than four-year universities. They struggled to find scholarships and worked a string of part-time jobs in the shadow economy. Their limited finances meant that many college students had to forego regular housing and meals. Figuring out how to eat and where to sleep was a constant concern. One youth who attended university away from home recounts, "I mean, it was survival. There were many times when I was like: 'What am I doing here?' I mean, I was going to school full-time, I was working full-time; I was doing everything you can think of. I had to, it was the only way. I was cleaning a lot of houses. I still remember some of my professors . . . I was like: 'It's fine! I don't mind cleaning your house. I really need the money.'"[4] Fulfilling basic physical needs was as much a part of college life as studying and passing exams. Many were able to overcome these barriers and finish their degrees, but still many others weren't. Those who dropped out of college joined the millions of other undocumented immigrants busing tables in restaurants, working in sweatshops, cleaning houses and hotels, performing day-labor jobs, mowing lawns. For those who finished college, most could not find a job in the areas they were trained because they did not have a work permit. After struggling and often failing to find employment in their professional fields, many were channeled back into the bottom end of the labor market.

In addition to facing these massive obstacles to the "American dream," the young adults have also had to contend with the countless forms of exclusion encountered in their daily lives. They have faced great difficulty driving, obtaining identification cards, opening bank accounts, going out and ordering drinks, traveling by plane, applying for "regular" jobs, or interacting with the police. These big and small forms of exclusion have served as constant reminders of their

"illegality."[5] In the eyes of their American-born friends and peers, they were "normal" people and bore no outward signs of "illegality."[6] As such, they have been expected to engage in the things that "normal" young adults do. Their citizen friends asked why they couldn't drive, go to the college of their choice, obtain normal identification, or pursue their chosen careers. Responding to recurrent questions of why they couldn't do these "normal" things contributed to resurgent feelings of embarrassment, awkwardness, silence, and shame. One DREAMer recounted a personal experience:

> I remember one time, going out for dinner and I wanted to get something to drink and I showed my [Mexican] Consulate ID and I remember the server was like, "Well sorry, we cannot take this." And I was like, okay, no problem. You just want to ignore it. And I remember one of the girls with us was like, "Why don't you have an ID?" I didn't even know her because she was a friend of my friend. And I was like, "Oh . . . well . . . " You're trying to think of something quick, "Oh well, I'm not from here." And she was like, "What do you mean? Are you an illegal?" It was so degrading! You're out at night, trying to go out with your friends and have some fun. And then for someone who doesn't even know you to label you like that; it was horrible. This kind of thing never stops.[7]

Each of these kinds of experiences reminds the youths of the stigma they bear. No matter how American they may feel, look, or talk, they cannot in the last instance shed their "illegality." Faced with massive barriers and constant reminders of their absolute difference, many resign themselves to the impossibility of having a "normal" American life and seek to make the most of their lives on the margins of this inhospitable country.

The explosion of open, public, and assertive demonstrations across the country in spring 2010 marked their entry on the national political stage as the DREAMers. These youth activists collectively asserted that they were undocumented, unafraid, and unapologetic. They publicly rejected a life in the shadows and demanded the right to be recognized as rights-deserving human beings. They had developed a sophisticated set of arguments to represent themselves and their cause. They argued that they were raised in America, they only knew this

country, and they were important contributors to its economic, civic, and moral life. They were not a "foreign" threat because they were Americans. They had played by all the rules and they now had a right to live out the American dream, just like anybody else. Denying them the right to live and thrive in the country would be a moral outrage and a profound injustice.

This was not an ephemeral cry. They did not just pierce the public sphere with one disruptive act—a demonstration, civil disobedience—and then quickly fade into silence after their fifteen minutes of political fame were up. Undocumented youths around the country, with the assistance of immigrant rights associations, formed college campus support groups, advocacy organizations in their communities, online networks through blogs, Facebook, Twitter and so on, and national organizations. This organizational infrastructure provided a safe and supportive environment for individuals to come out and talk about their status with others like themselves. Individual youths began to learn that they were not alone. They learned that there were hundreds and thousands of people in a very similar situation and that they were all facing common hopes, obstacles, fears, and dreams.

DREAMers in these organizations also extended their reach outward into their communities. They went to the media, high schools, churches, and community meetings to share their experiences and stories with others. The constant struggle to push their message out in these public arenas attracted more supporters and connected them to youths living their lives silently in the shadows. At one outreach meeting at a Los Angeles-area church, one DREAMer reported the following encounter to his organization:

> I noticed the girl on my right, Maria, wipe a tear from her eye. I looked across from me and saw a different girl, Cathy, whose eyes were getting red. . . . I asked Cathy if she knew someone who was undocumented. She nodded. I asked "Are you undocumented?" and she said "yes" tearfully. "Have you ever revealed yourself?" and she said "no." "So, this is your coming out," I added, and we applauded for her. She said she came here when she was nine, didn't bother going to college because she didn't know how. . . . It was at that point the girl to my right, Maria, started

> crying. . . . She said, "Let me tell you my story. I was my class Valedictorian. I had perfect grades. I was all set to get a full scholarship to any school of my choice. It was then that they said there was a problem with my social security number. I went home and my mother said she made it up. I didn't have one. I tried to go to college, but had to work, it was too much." What's interesting, Maria and Cathy didn't know this about each other. . . . So in the end, what started out as a presentation to a group unsure of their own mission for a community project became a coming out of the shadows. . . . *I'm going to say it again, without even trying, we find the undocumented, we find allies, we get stronger. Imagine what we can do if we set our minds to it*.[8]

The constant effort to extend their organizational reach out into their communities has provided new opportunities to establish connections to isolated and unconnected youths. The complex and intertwined DREAMer organizations that developed in the latter part of the 2000s allowed individual youths to discover their group by connecting individuals to one another and providing them with enormous amounts of support.

DREAMer organizations and networks have also helped to circulate arguments and messages concerning why undocumented youths deserve the right to live in the country. Through their interactions with other undocumented youths, they learned the discourses, arguments, and messages that framed their claims to equal rights. By talking about their feelings, dreams, rights, and injustices, the youths absorbed the themes of their incipient movement. This kind of political socialization helped shape how they thought and felt about their own "illegality." They learned that there was nothing to be ashamed of. They also learned that sticking together as a group allowed them to make powerful claims for equal rights. There was power in numbers and in a morally compelling argument. Their message and commitment made it possible to occupy the offices of senators and of Homeland Security and to undertake acts of civil disobedience. Their formation into a self-conscious and an internally bounded group made it possible to gain support from broad swaths of the public and mitigate the risks of detention and deportation. Even in the most hostile states

like Arizona, protesting DREAMers had become "undeportable." By coming out and saying "undocumented, unafraid, and unapologetic," they had demonstrated that a life outside the shadows was possible for themselves and all undocumented immigrants. This dramatic expression of equality was possible only after the youths had become a political group with its own representations, arguments, organizations, solidarities, and beliefs in what was good and just.

This book charts the remarkable transformation of dispersed undocumented youths into the powerful political group of the DREAMers. It intends to explain how, in the span of ten years, this group came to assume a leading role in the country's immigration debates. This is not only the story of the DREAMers but of the entire immigrant rights movement because the DREAMers did not emerge in a vacuum. They emerged from a longer-standing movement. The leading rights associations in the movement took a role in crafting the representations of the youths, setting up DREAM organizations and connecting youth activists, and training the youths to carry their messages into the public sphere. The DREAMers were conceived by these national immigrant rights associations as a way to push the general struggle for immigrant rights forward in a context where few political opportunities existed. While large and professional rights associations sought to exercise control over the DREAMers, the youth eventually asserted autonomy and control over their own struggle and their place within the immigrant rights movement. They assumed a place as first among equals within the movement, collaborating, deciding, and mobilizing fellow DREAMers alongside other groups and actors in the immigrant rights movement. Together, they would not only push for the passage of the DREAM Act but also for the rights of all undocumented immigrants living in the United States.

Producing a Voice in a Hostile Context

The formation of the DREAMers and their strong presence on the national political stage presents us with an interesting puzzle because it departs from our standard sociological expectations. Much of the recent scholarship on immigration politics from the United States and

Europe suggests that hostile environments would encourage undocumented immigrants to turn away from the public sphere of receiving countries. The scholarship suggests that growing nationalism and xenophobia offer few if any opportunities for stigmatized immigrants to make strong public claims to rights.[9] Most natives have difficulty recognizing undocumented immigrants as human beings with basic inalienable rights because they have been portrayed as threats and polluters of the national community.[10] Rather than being "persons" with inalienable rights protected by law, they are considered "aliens" whose lives are governed by arbitrary government decrees. Giorgio Agamben suggests, "In the system of the nation-state, *the so-called sacred and inalienable rights of man show themselves to lack every protection at the moment in which they can no longer take the form of rights belonging to citizens of a state.*"[11] The "illegality" of undocumented immigrants provides further justification that their basic rights can be arbitrarily rescinded by the will of the majority.[12] Under these conditions, achieving legitimacy for claims to basic rights would be difficult if not *impossible*.[13] Those undocumented immigrants who mobilized in these contexts not only would be perceived as "noise" from a foreign and illegitimate mob, but also would risk detection, detention, and deportation for themselves and their families.[14] Undocumented immigrants have, therefore, been cast into the shadows of the private arena, tending to their basic physical survival and avoiding the public and political worlds of receiving countries.

If the shadows were indeed the fate of undocumented immigrants, how could the DREAMers have created a strong and legitimate voice in the public sphere? This group of undocumented immigrants learned how to construct compelling rights claims, identify public arenas, such as campuses and the Internet, to express their claims, plan and undertake high-risk protests, and lobby public officials to support bills recognizing their rights and the rights of other undocumented immigrants in the country.

What is even more puzzling is that the DREAMers do not appear to be alone. Undocumented immigrants in countries as diverse as Spain, France, the United Kingdom, Germany, and the Netherlands have brought their cases directly into the public sphere, argued that the

current system is unjust and has wronged them, and developed powerful and broadly supported rights claims.[15] Rather than turn away from the public sphere as an arena to be avoided, these activists have transformed the public spheres in the United States and other countries into strategic places for making rights claims. To draw on the language of the lesbian and gay rights movement, "coming out" has become more advantageous than "staying in the closet."

We know why undocumented immigrants *should* turn away from hostile political worlds, but we cannot explain how certain undocumented groups like the DREAMers struggle to create a public, powerful, and legitimate voice in hostile countries. That is, we can account for their "exit" into the shadows, but we cannot explain how such "pariahs" of law and nation create a public "voice."[16] Some recent scholarship on the immigrant rights movement in the United States moves us in the right direction for understanding these issues, but research still falls short of providing an account of how a legitimate and public voice for undocumented immigrants is produced.[17] For example, these studies describe and analyze how activists, advocates, and supporters mobilized in massive demonstrations in 2006 to fight repressive immigration bills, but they do not address the core issue of how undocumented immigrants overcome barriers, construct a powerful and legitimate voice, and assert this voice in the public sphere. We learn from these studies that the making of a voice is possible, but we still lack the theoretical tools to understand how this is actually done.

In telling the unlikely story of how disparate undocumented youths became a politically identifiable group called the DREAMers, the book analyzes how a legitimate "public" voice was produced for this group. Creating such a voice was not a matter of choice, but rather was the product of a long, complicated process. Undocumented youths in 2001 did not suddenly choose to craft a voice that would transmit their claims for rights into the public sphere. These young adults started their battles facing a major hurdle—they were branded as "illegal aliens" and were therefore not recognized as legitimate claims makers or holders of inalienable rights. Crafting a voice required them to undertake an arduous process of finding small cracks in the legal and moral systems of the country, making arguments for why their group

deserved basic rights, gaining the support of many different allies, and asserting a certain degree of unity and discipline within their ranks.

Generally speaking, all undocumented immigrants have faced an environment made up of general hostility *and* several "niche openings." On the one hand, undocumented immigrants in the United States, especially from Latin America, have faced great hostility in the past twenty years. They have been represented as competitors for jobs and freeloaders on an overburdened public sector.[18] Their "illegality" makes them a threat to national sovereignty and the rule of law. Seen by most natives as less than fully human, anti-immigrant activists and policymakers have called for the suspension of basic rights, the rollout of harsh enforcement measures, and the enhancement of border security.[19] The "war on terror" only intensified feelings of hostility and fear, with anti-immigrant advocates and policymakers making direct links between immigrants, borders, and terrorists.[20] Hostility and enhanced enforcement during the 1990s and early 2000s therefore closed down political opportunities for big immigration reforms and elevated the risks of public protest for undocumented immigrants. On the other hand, legal, economic, and moral ambiguities have arisen over the extent to which *all* undocumented immigrants should be considered fully "illegal."[21]

Such ambiguities combine to create "niche openings" for groups of immigrants, including students, youths, children, family members, and workers in certain sectors, who may be considered deserving of some form of legal residency status. Just as the government has developed ways to further rollback the rights of undocumented immigrants, legal openings have emerged for cases protected by the Constitution, the courts, and international treaties (in the cases of families, children, asylum seekers, and so on).[22] Moreover, a number of industries have pressured the government to ensure continued access to a steady supply of immigrant labor, such as in the areas of agriculture, hospitality, and construction.[23] The rollout of more enforcement and border security measures has prompted these industries to make increased demands for exceptions for certain categories of immigrant workers. Lastly, some groups of immigrants may elicit sympathy from important segments of the native population because they may possess attributes

that resonate strongly with national values and humanitarian norms.[24] Some groups of immigrants may be well assimilated, have good and useful jobs, possess families with small children, or exhibit some other attributes that resonate with the values and moralities of nationals. The public may be swayed to support exceptions for these morally ambivalent cases while still demanding that the government ensure border closure for most others.

Undocumented immigrants face a unique political environment characterized by closure for most but niche openings for some groups in possession of strategic legal, economic, and cultural attributes. In this environment, the possibilities for major reforms, amnesties, and legalizations are extremely limited, encouraging immigrant rights advocates to push for narrow groups and issues that stand much greater chances of success (that is, piecemeal measures). In 2001, national immigrant rights associations and their allies in Congress believed that a niche opening existed for undocumented youths, precipitating the creation of the decade long DREAM campaign.

Niche openings have been a necessary condition for some undocumented immigrants to gain a foothold, but they are by no means sufficient for creating a legitimate and convincing public voice. A group of undocumented immigrants, like the undocumented youths of this book, presented with a narrow opening continue to face powerful adversaries. Anti-immigrant advocates respond to the rights claims of immigrants with the slogan: "What part of illegal don't you understand?"[25] In spite of the special circumstances or situations of a group, antagonists believe that their essential "illegality" makes them totally ineligible of any rights in the country. Facing these powerful headwinds, a group of undocumented immigrants struggling to assert a voice must craft representations that counter the stigmatizing arguments of their adversaries and build a sympathetic public portrait of their group. They construct a representation of the group focused narrowly on the attributes that match the existing niche opening.[26] Their messages, talking points, and emotional stories stress the most strategic qualities of the group, silencing those other aspects that may distort their central message. These representations help transform a diverse array of individuals—with many different qualities, backgrounds, and

cultures—into a coherent and deserving "group" that fits an available niche.[27] In addition to demonstrating their fit in a narrow opening, they must also demonstrate their fit in the country. This involves crafting discourses that cleanse the group of the polluting stigmas attributed to undocumented immigrants.[28] Well-placed immigrants, like undocumented youths, must demonstrate that they are not free riders, unassimilated, culpable for their illegality, or irreducibly foreign. It also helps to be able to demonstrate both conformity to national values and the ways they stand to make an important contribution to the country. Their hard work ethic, love of family, and civic engagement build on core national values and reinvigorate the moral and economic life of the nation.[29] Demonstrating *national identification* strengthens the argument that they are not a threat to the nation but an exceptional group that deserves an exemption from exclusionary immigration rules. Natives can thus begin to recognize that these exceptional immigrants are human beings who may deserve the right to reside in the country legally. Once the strategy of national identification reveals their humanity, support may broaden and the group of undocumented immigrants can transform a narrow opening into a real and sustained political opportunity.

This discursive strategy is by no means the only strategy available to a group. But under conditions of intense hostility, it is the strategy that is likely to be the most effective. More radical arguments calling for the end of borders and the immediate extension of full citizenship to all undocumented immigrants, irrespective of their attributes, would likely be rejected as the "noise" of "crazy illegals" and not the "voice" of a deserving and reasonable group of immigrants. Rights advocates are quite conscious of this. While they are by no means bound to pursue the strategy described above, many select this strategy over the alternatives because it is better able to gain the support of a leery and antagonistic public.

Good representations are important but so too are strong and supportive networks. Crafting a voice requires ties with well-established advocacy groups and rights associations. High levels of cultural and symbolic capital are needed to produce a strong and legitimate voice.[30] Rights advocates must have an intimate knowledge of the political

culture of the country and understand how to pitch messages in ways that resonate with natives at intellectual, moral, and emotional levels.[31] They must also possess enough symbolic capital (that is, legitimacy) to ensure that what they say is considered reasonable and believable by the national public. Lastly, they must possess connections with media gatekeepers who can assist in transmitting their frames, messages, and talking points to the public. While these forms of cultural and symbolic capital are necessary for producing compelling representations, they are not equally distributed across the immigrant rights movement. Newly arrived or newly politicized undocumented immigrants are unlikely to possess sufficient levels of capital needed to produce effective and believable representations. The nationally specific nature of cultural and symbolic capital means that even the most sophisticated newcomers will have difficulty representing their demands and concerns in the most appropriate ways. The relative poverty of recent immigrant activists, both in terms of cultural and symbolic capital, requires them to depend on well-established advocacy organizations in possession of these scarce resources, such as professional immigrant rights associations, labor unions, religious organizations, and so on.[32] These "support" organizations provide crucial resources to immigrants including legal knowledge, knowledge of national political cultures and institutions, legitimacy, and communication expertise. They can use these strategic resources to translate the rights claims of the immigrant group into powerful arguments that resonate with the norms and values of the national public. The "voice" of the undocumented immigrant is therefore not necessarily crafted by undocumented immigrants themselves but well-established support associations, *at least in the early stages of a campaign*.

The DREAMer as a political group was not necessarily created by undocumented youths themselves. Rather, professional rights associations identified a niche for well-integrated undocumented students in 2001 and launched a campaign to pass the DREAM Act. Investing considerable cultural and symbolic capital, leading immigrant rights associations created the public figure of the "DREAMer." They argued that these youths were exceptionally good immigrants and particularly deserving of legalization. These associations were responsible for

introducing the issue of undocumented college students into Congress, deciding what strategy was right for the youths, crafting and controlling their representation in the public sphere, and representing them directly to political officials and the media. While this representation was crafted in the earlier years of the mobilization (2001–8), it served as a framework that influenced how activists in later years produced messages and arguments about themselves and their cause.

Good representations need to be transmitted into the public sphere in a disciplined manner. If activists do not impose discipline on their public message, the message will neither stick nor be well received by the general public. In countless cases, the claims of protesters pierce the public sphere and then quickly fade from the public's political imagination, as was the case with the Occupy Wall Street mobilizations in 2011. In other instances, aggrieved protesters may be rejected by the public as noise from an unruly mob.[33] Creating and sustaining legitimacy for a group of stigmatized outsiders requires the leadership to impose discipline on both the message and the messengers. In the case of the DREAMers campaign, the leadership centralized message production, structured messages through the use of talking points, and silenced utterances and symbols that detracted from the core argument. Just as important, they disciplined undocumented youth activists who were responsible for carrying the message into the public sphere. Disciplining youth activists was a challenging task considering the thousands of different activists and organizations involved in various DREAM campaigns. By the second half of the 2000s, immigrant rights associations had developed a complex and integrated infrastructure to produce a common message and to train activists in localities around the country. The leaders sought to diffuse talking points downward into the grassroots. Training sessions helped socialize youth activists into the DREAMer discourse, shaped their views of their place and rights in the country, and contributed to forming individual undocumented youths into a common political subject with common worldviews, aspirations, and emotional dispositions.[34] This disciplinary infrastructure therefore kept activists on message, but it also transformed youths into actual DREAMers who saw, felt, and experienced their political worlds in very similar ways.

The steps described above—namely, identifying niche openings, crafting compelling representations, forming strategic alliances, disciplining messages and messengers—have provided a narrow path for a group of undocumented immigrants to produce a legitimate voice. Recognition of a group's legitimacy does not lead to the automatic extension of legal rights. It only makes it *possible* for this group's legalization to become an issue of legitimate public debate. However, the process that gives legitimacy to a political group also generates many contradictions. The long and arduous struggle to create a political group with a legitimate voice has rendered important cleavages between the different allies involved. These cleavages have resulted in forceful disagreements and conflicts over who deserves rights, how rights should be represented, and who should be representing immigrants and their struggles in the public sphere. While these disagreements risk fragmenting the immigrant rights movement, they also introduce new ideas about what rights are and what are the best strategies to achieve them. The disagreements resulting from internal contradictions can certainly be destructive, but they can also be moments of great creativity, where different activists and advocates discover new ways to push their struggles for equality and justice forward.

Stressing the attributes that make some groups of undocumented immigrants deserving of legalization contributes to sharpening differences with other undocumented groups. By representing individuals with select attributes as exceptional, advocates assert that the possession of these scarce attributes makes their case more deserving and pressing than others. DREAMers have stressed high levels of assimilation, education, and innocence as the attributes that make the case of undocumented youths compelling and exceptional. Other immigrants who lack these attributes, including adults, unassimilated, poor and dependent, "guilty," and so on, may find it more difficult to make arguments in support of themselves and their cause. The political success of a group can reinforce legal as well as rhetorical obstacles. Political success means establishing new categories (for example, DREAM-eligibility) with restrictive eligibility criteria (age, time in the country, education requirements, and so on). The rhetoric of the "deserving immigrant" is enacted into real legal categories, resulting in the unequal distribution

of rights and privileges on the basis of one's possession of strategic attributes. Niche openings therefore provide undocumented immigrants with one of the only realistic pathways in a closed and hostile environment, but responding to these openings aggravates important discursive and legal cleavages between legalizable and unlegalizable immigrants. This gives rise to critiques directed at a strategy that seeks out exceptions for privileged groups of immigrants. Critics may then push for a more radical and universal position that rights should be granted to everybody irrespective of their exceptional attributes. This cleavage is and remains an important source of tension, disagreement, and reflection within the contemporary immigrant rights movement.

When human and immigrant rights associations assume central roles in representing undocumented immigrants to media and politicians, rank-and-file undocumented activists may give rise to another set of cleavages. Leading associations assume a central role in designing the strategy, setting up targets and priorities, creating the messaging campaign, and training the activists to deliver the message in a disciplined fashion. Leaders believe that by controlling representations, the movement is better able to produce and deliver messages and arguments in public, which in turn increases the chance of achieving the goal of legalization. However, dominance of these associations—run mostly by university-educated, middle-class citizens—over the representational process introduces an important cleavage with rank-and-file undocumented activists. Many in the rank and file may begin to question whether leading immigrant rights associations can actually represent the "true" interests of undocumented immigrants. In 2010, as leading rights associations sought to control the discourse and strategy of the campaign, many DREAMers and youth activists felt deprived of the possibilities to speak for themselves in the public sphere. Unable to express their own voices in *their* campaign led some DREAMers to rethink the meaning of their struggle for equality. If it was about gaining the legal right to stay in the country, it was now also about gaining recognition for themselves as political equals who could speak for themselves.[35] Being able to speak in the public sphere was viewed as a precondition of equality, so the

act of representing became not simply a means to an end, as the association believed, but rather an end in its own right. Those blocking their abilities to speak, namely, the leading associations, were therefore viewed as blocking undocumented youths from achieving equality in the polis. DREAMers continued to criticize the government for denying them the right to stay in the country, but they now also criticized the immigrant rights associations for denying them the right to represent themselves.

The efforts of DREAM activists and their allies created a political group with a compelling and legitimate voice by 2010 and 2011. But this group was by no means unified. The process of producing the group and its voice necessarily introduced disagreements and conflicts. These disagreements have been a double-edged sword: they are destructive because they give rise to factionalism that can undermine the collective power of the movement, but they are also creative because they help generate new ideas and discourses about equality, rights, and citizenship. Debates and disagreements permit activists to discover the limits of preexisting strategies and create new ones that they believe are more appropriate, inclusive, and equal. Such disagreements disrupt the reproduction of older and sometimes exclusionary understandings of rights, for example, stressing national belonging, and point out new directions outside the well-worn strategies and notions of the past.[36] The new discourses and views that emerged since 2010 have sat beside those produced in earlier stages of the movement, resulting in a cacophony of arguments, frames, utterances, strategies, and visions in the same social movement.

The process of creating a political group with a legitimate voice does not simply result in discourses that affirm a single idea of citizenship. Rather, it produces multiple discourses, ideas, and schemas of citizenship, some of which complement one another and some of which conflict. The very difficult challenge for a mature rights movements, made up of many different factions and arguments, is to stitch together some of these discordant discourses into a compelling mobilization frame that convinces *both* the fractious activists making up the movement and the more conservative publics making up the nation.[37]

I use the term "DREAMer" to describe politically active undocumented young adults who self-identify as "DREAMers" and who have worked in campaigns to advance the rights of undocumented youth in the country. The DREAMers are remarkable for many reasons. This group has become a driving force of immigration debates and politics in spite of its political nonexistence before 2001. While the DREAMers have not yet succeeded in passing the federal DREAM Act, they enter 2013 with great momentum and have played a leading role in pushing for large-scale immigration reform. This book reveals that while there are certain networks, histories, claims, and feelings that produce a common political group, there are many differences that distinguish the individuals making up this political group. I have drawn on newspapers, the online interventions of DREAMers, interviews, and participant observation to highlight these commonalities and differences (see Appendix for full discussion of methods). The study focuses on the DREAMers in Southern California and uses them as a window for understanding the national movement. This approach makes it harder to make big claims about the "national" character of the movement, but it provides us with the depth needed to understand its microscopic dynamics. By uncovering such dynamics, we are in a better place to understand how these youths achieved a degree of unity and power in the face of all the differences making up their group.

The case of the DREAMers is unique, but I believe their struggle provides important lessons for other undocumented immigrants and marginalized peoples struggling for rights in the United States and beyond. The most important lesson is that while struggles for rights are difficult for highly stigmatized groups, they are not impossible. The process is hard, piecemeal, nonlinear, and full of contradictions and internal conflicts. We learn that even when governments take aggressive measures to exclude certain groups, cracks often open up in defensive walls and provide outsiders with small niche openings. When outsiders can demonstrate their fit in a niche, they can begin to enhance their legitimacy and expand their bases of support. As these struggles gain traction, they may open up possibilities for some groups but also introduce new closures for others. The contradictory nature

of these struggles introduces questions and disagreements into these movements, which compel constant reflections over rights and the most appropriate strategies for achieving them. The book is, therefore, specifically about the DREAMers, but their remarkable case informs our general understandings of how outcast groups struggle for rights, equality, and respect in hostile countries.