it was all a DREAM

Writings by Undocumented Youth at UC Berkeley
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Edited by Marco Antonio Flores

A PROJECT OF THE CENTER FOR RACE & GENDER,
MULTICULTURAL COMMUNITY CENTER,
AND CENTER FOR LATINO POLICY RESEARCH
We dedicate this collection of work, our dreams, sleeping and awake, to those who came before us, for paving the way and creating bridges. And to the many young warriors of the heart who will come after us, we gift you these palabritas del corazón.

Pero sobre todo, para nuestros padres, familias, queridxs quien siempre nos recuerdan que también de este lado hay sueños. For everything they’ve taught us during moments of silence, and of immense fear. Always Califas dreamin’, ¡adelante!

*Marco Antonio Flores*
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface
Marco Antonio Flores i

Foreword
Evelyn Nakano Glenn ix

Looking Forward
Alberto Ledesma xi

“Our Undocumented Lives”
Marco Antonio Flores 1

“We dared to think we could collect Our dreams and make them realities by living life without papers, and we did.”

My Nights At Eshleman
Gabriela Monico 3

Diary of a College Girl
Linda Azucena Sánchez 5

UC Berkeley DREAM Act Student
Ju Hong 9

Our Dream
Alejandro Jimenez 13

Living the trailer lifestyle
Gabriela Monico 17

“Y así fue como llegó la hora de decirte adiós, Madre Patria.”

Las camisas con caricature
Alejandro Jimenez 21

Ofrenda
Andrea Guerrero 27

De Cuzcatlán al Norte
Gabriela Monico 31

Hide and Go Seek on the Otay Mesa Border
Miriam Avilez 35

I Am a Turtle
Chantiri Ramirez 41

Estoy contenta
Gabriela Monico 45
“... these dreams in my head”

“the uninvisible”
montzerrat garcía

episteme/ xitim o

Daydreamin’

montzerrat garcía

Even if they turn the lights out...
linda azucena sánchez

Afraid of the Unknown

montzerrat garcía

I Am Always Out of Place

linda azucena sánchez

Love, Memory

Cafecito

humberto ortiz

Out of necessity to survive

chantiri ramirez

5:25 A.M.

marco antonio flores

Quédate quieto

marco antonio flores

Afterword

Carla trujillo

CRG Research Report

uc berkeley center for race & gender

center for latino policy research

Biographies of Contributors
LIST OF IMAGES

Figure 1. Cover: Alberto Ledesma, Hey Waldo, can you find a Berkeley dreamer? (2012)
Figure 2. Alberto Ledesma, Hey Waldo, can you find a Berkeley dreamer? (2012)
Figure 3. Alberto Ledesma, Writing courses were sites of terror… (2013)
Figure 4. Alberto Ledesma, A Dreamer’s Gift (2013)
Figure 5. Julio Salgado, Your mind is sacred/Care for it and protect it (2013)
Figure 6. Julio Salgado, Do the right thing Obama (2011)
Figure 7. Alberto Ledesma, There is no ‘back of the line’ (2014)
Figure 8. Alberto Ledesma, Breaking down my lived experience into its constituent parts (2013)
Figure 9. Alberto Ledesma, One dreamer, many dreams (2014)
Figure 10. Alberto Ledesma, Little Diego, Dreamer Boy (2013)
Figure 11. Alberto Ledesma, Border fear (2014)
Figure 12. Alberto Ledesma, Reflecting on the fact that the poverty rate among certain immigrant communities is still high (2014)
Figure 13. Alberto Ledesma, On the Metaphysics of being undocumented, version 2 (2013)
Figure 14. Julio Salgado, My parents are courageous and responsible (2011)
Figure 15. Alberto Ledesma, Gloria Anzaldúa (2012)
Figure 16. Alberto Ledesma, Just waiting to flourish (2013)
Figure 17. Alberto Ledesma, Genesis of a dream (2013)
Figure 18. Alberto Ledesma, UndocuLisa (2013)
Figure 19. Julio Salgado, No Sir I will not show you my papers (2011)
Figure 20. Julio Salgado, Undocumented, Unafraid and Unapologetic (2011)
Figure 21. Alberto Ledesma, The Unbearable Weight of Being an Undocumented Lover (2012)
Figure 22. Alberto Ledesma, I guess unconditional love was antithetical to my immigrant fatalism (2013)
Figure 23. Julio Salgado, Who are you calling low skilled? (2013)
Figure 24. Julio Salgado, Queer Butterfly (2013)
Figure 25. Julio Salgado, Out of your hands and into your mind (2014)
Figure 26. Julio Salgado, It takes a muscle to fall in love… (2013)
Lately, I have been revisiting some letters. Most of them were written to me by my grandmother in the ’90s. In most of her letters she’d tell me, “Escribeme, no seas flojo. Me siento sola.” She wrote hundreds of pages, all in cursive. As a child, I often imagined her writing, hovering over her kitchen table. I used to think that’s all she did, write. She was deaf. Mamá once told me, “tú abuela tiene mucho que contar, te ha guardado todos los buenos recuerditos de tu niñez.” Perhaps this was mamá’s way of telling me abuela was asking me to listen. Perhaps this was mamá’s way of telling me this was the only way of “going back” through abuela’s cuentos.

Over the phone, she’d talk and talk. I’d listen; but most of the time my childish mind became distracted. Pero abuela wanted to hear from us, from me. I never did write back as often as she wrote to me. Today, only less than a scattered few water stained letters remain. At least what mamá was able to salvage from a water leak a few months back. They remind me of my father’s letters to mamá during his time in prison, “escribeme gordita, me siento solo.” Today, I ask myself how much has been lost in my family. Childhood memories growing up with my tías before arriving to the U.S. in 1994. Mamá’s home, México.

Abuela passed away in 2001 and papá left our family shortly thereafter. I wonder of all the silences that remain in my family, all I wish to speak to. What happened to all of abuela’s stuff back in México? And then I think of mamá, of everything she may know. Everything she may remember, everything she may still feel. I think of all that has been replaced by “no pues, no recuerdo.” Those profound suspiros that fill long silences in our phone conversations, “Marco, busca lo bueno y lo encontrarás.” Perhaps in this process of writing, I can make sense of lost memories. Memories that have been replaced by cicatrices, golpes and maltratos.

And in this process of remembering, I am fighting against amnesia. Amnesia of what makes familia, my undocumented raza, and scattered pieces of myself. Hay días que no encuentro el camino, me siento perdido. Perhaps in writing, I can learn to measure the depths of my heart with the ocean. And then again, perhaps this process can do me some good. A good remedio, a looking back of sorts. Cherrie L. Moraga once told me, “Marco, you must be able to go back home.” She is right. This is always the start to learning to be well, by remembering. By going back.

Mamá, I’m coming home.
Flipping through pages of the compilation of collected pieces, I wait for Richmond BART to arrive. Another edited version. My finger follows sentence after sentence. Words infused with red stained marks, I circle what remains unclear to me. Punctuation. Grammar. 

*There are chunks of writing in Spanish, do they need to be translated?*

I sit to read Chantiri’s poem, “3 minutes for San Francisco train.”

*Es así como las palabras cicatrizan el cuerpo*
y cuando al espejo te ves
y encuentras esas marquitas,
*rojas, delgadas*
tu sabes,
*las palabras*
siguen todavía
*ahí.*

“¿Lo puedo leer?” A woman sitting next to me asks, reaching out for the poem in my hands.

“Sí, claro,” I state without hesitation. It simply felt right saying yes.

Cradling her newborn on her right arm, the other sits next to her, “Está muy bonito, yo también estoy pasando por algo así. ¿Lo escribistes tú?”

“No, lo escribió mi amiga,” waving at the bebita hiding next to her. Holding her mother’s shirt, she pulls it across her face.

“Que difícil es callar cuando uno carga tanto dolor,” she plays with her son’s hair. Her fingers running along his thick black hair. Big brown eyes looking at her, he is the promise of joy.

“A mi me gusta leer pero nunca tengo tiempo con estos chiquillos.” She has three children, one in high school.

“Mi hijo quiere estudiar tecnología, pero también le gusta escribir. Escribe muy bonito.” I simply listen.

“San Francisco BART is now approaching,” the telecom announces.

“Dile a la muchacha que lo escribió que escribe muy bonito,” she reaches to grab her niñas small hand.

BART fast approaching, no tengo las palabras. Un solo, “adios.” Entering BART I watch them hold hands and walk inside. Doors close. I wonder if I will cross paths with her again. Maybe then, I’ll have found the right words.

*Here, no translation is needed. Nuestras palabras viven.*
She came to visit me in my dream last night, the woman from Fruitvale BART. This time, there are no children with her. It’s only her and I at the train station. Holding a stack of blank pages she looks at me, “escribelo, no tengas miedo.” My chest feels heavy, I can hear the beat of my heart ringing in my ears. I remain quiet. She insists, “ándale.” But I remain without saying a word until her train arrives. Walking away she turns back before the doors close, “escribe, te hará libre.” Doors are now closing, she has left the blank pages beside me. They scatter in the air as BART disappears in the distance.

I cannot remove the image from my mind, she lingers. I see my mother in her, another woman living with secrets. Mujer, madre de tres, a woman afraid of losing her children to their father because she doesn’t have papeles. “Es mejor quedar callado,” that’s what mamá always told me growing up. The conversation was always about keeping silent, “tú no digas nada.” This was the only way to talk about our undocumented status.

It was always the same conversation about learning to live sin papeles, “si alguien te preguntan de donde eres, no digas nada. Es mejor quedar callado.” But silence did not protect us from my fathers insultos, his drunken rage on weekends. Silence was only a temporary way out because for mamá it was better to endure the golpes than deal with the fear of her children being taken away.

It was always the fear of la migra knocking on your front door, ready to take your children.

***

“Why do you write these secrets and dreams? Aren’t you afraid that someone will find you?” A friend asks after I tell her about my late night journal entries. I stay quiet, look straight ahead so that I don’t make eye contact, “because if I don’t, who will?” I am tired of explaining myself.

I wonder how many of us have kept secrets; secrets at the risk of our own survival. Secrets fueled by the fear of being separated from our familia. Secrets that have caused us anxiety, keeping us up late at night. Late night studies apply, plus a heavy dose of uncertain futures.

I think of the work we’ve done here, as an undocumented writing collective, learning to write without secrets. Learning to expose stories that have been kept locked deep within ourselves, stored away for the right moment to come out. How is it possible that we have been conditioned to be afraid of our own words? I am grateful we have found each other. Running into each other as we go from class to class, walking through Sather Gate, walking UC Berkeley campus with the fear of being “found.” We carry these secrets with us, hold them tight, and make meaning of them.

¿A quién le contamos? We had each other to expose our truths.
Exposure never felt so naked, so raw, and sweet all at once. It meant flesh, being alive and living the every-day struggles of being undocumented in this country. Learning to live in a country that doesn’t want us for the color of our skin or the accent in which we speak.

It was this writing that has mattered the most to me. It taught me that our late night llanto is not the only language we know. We have taken what is rightfully ours, our stories, and made something with them. So when asked, “Why do I write?” I think of the work we’ve started here, we have been able to fill blank pages. They have meant survival, documenting what was meant to be forgotten or kept unseen, unspoken.

And perhaps this is what we are doing here, aún estamos en busca de palabras. But we have a start. And beyond much of what we fear, and what we think we know, we are searching for purpose. A connection deeper than ourselves and the world in front of us.

From the Start
September 2014 - Berkeley, Califas

A lot has happened since the start of it all. This project has taken time, we started in Fall 2010. It took on and off meetings, scheduling writing sessions, follow-ups and many absences. Students graduated, some left in the Bay Area and others remained with us. It was difficult but not impossible, as long as we kept writing. It is now 2014, there have been many changes.

First the passing of AB130 and AB131, legislation providing AB540 undocumented students with scholarships and financial aid at California public colleges and university. The lack of financial aid was a major hurdle for undocumented students at UC Berkeley, creating tremendous stress as we maintained a full course load and worked odd jobs to keep our tummies from turning into knots. Since the opening of the DREAM Resource Center in 2012, we have accomplished a kind of visibility within the undergraduate student population. We now have a presence that was often kept underground among undocumented students in the past, and seen as controversial among faculty and staff.

Today a new wave of undocumented students are emerging. Many are now DACAmented, eligible for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, a new form of legislation allowing some us to be eligible for work authorization and prosecutorial discretion to defer removal action against an individual. Many enter Sather Gate with what we’ve called, “the Cadillac package” or full funding. This may establish a sense of “belonging” on campus but not a sense of the history of undocumented students on the UC Berkeley campus. There are moments when I am afraid, I hope they don’t forget of those who came before them. Because fitting into the mold is easy, walking blindly through halls of Barrows Hall may keep us out of trouble but will
not fulfill the promise of the work ahead of us. There is only so much we can do from within the ivory tower; liberation of peoples, the promise of our movement, has always been more than just that.

It is a reminder that the dream goes beyond undocumented students. Who is left out of this undocumented student narrative? Who are the unwanted? Who are those labeled as the undeserving pests to American society? The “dream” goes beyond ourselves. We seek justice for our parents who have worked under cruel conditions, our familias, those that are sent back to their “home country” without a single recollection of it, those that remain missing at the border or overseas, all those who are seen as a “burden” to this country. Yet we continue to work endless hours for little pay and endure cruel treatment. We are all witness to America’s imagination of Gringolandia, we are all victims of the well sold “American Dream.”

Hence the title, “It Was All a Dream”—a reference to the opening line in The Notorious B.I.G.’s classic 1994 hip-hop record, “Juicy,” a song that resonated with many of us. It was all a dream—a testament to our ongoing haters that we learned to hustle despite the great odds, to conjuring a future despite the haze of racist contempt, to embracing our rebelliousness.

We have dared to sense dreams beyond the simple use of rhetoric. We’ve learned to create meaning through our vivid imagination. Because at times of despair, our dreams gave us purpose. We dared to see a dream beyond the well-constructed and sanitized narrative of undocumented students pursuing an education. And in a more profound sense, we dare to dream beyond the white man’s fictitious story of the ‘American Dream.”

Since the start, dreams have been our daily dose of medicine. Dreams have given us hope during moments of fear. They have been a profound awakening within ourselves, a body felt knowing that has arrived to us during late night writings and while we sleep. They have served as reminders to make sense of this unjust country. They taught us that there is always a way to hold each other even when we are most afraid of telling. Because as Audre Lorde beautifully puts it, “The white fathers told us, I think therefore I am; and the black mothers in each of us—the poet—whispers in our dreams, I feel therefore I can be free.” I am a firm believer of words and their magic. I am a firm believer of the dreams that sparked images and words in this collection. Our stories will set us free.

Always Califas dreamin’, somos corazón.
Agradecimientos

To those who took this journey with us and our palabras, thank you. Gracias de todo corazón for believing in our stories as we began to scratch the surface of our own words. Thank you for keeping an ear close to our stories despite our fear in sharing and "exposing" our truths. Thank you for always responding to our emails, looking over our words, and for dedicating hours of your time.

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Gracias Profa Lisa García-Bedolla, we are grateful for the creative space we were given to meet and write. For some time the Center for Latino Policy Research became our second home, where we came together to cry and share moments of uncertainty in our lives. This is where we held onto each other during late night conversations and enjoyed weekend pláticas. Even if we weren’t writing, we had enough chisme to talk about.

I am grateful to each visiting artist who came to share their craft: Gonzalo Arrizón, Momo Chang, Reid Gomez, Arikó Ikehara, Alberto Ledesma, Cherrie L. Moraga, Monica Regan, Margaret Rhee, Lisa Marie Rollins, and Rita E. Urquijo-Ruiz. For
reminding us that we must give ourselves permission to write from that place of secrecy; to write those parts of ourselves we have hidden or ignored and to write those parts of ourselves that we were made to feel ashamed of. For all your creative writing lessons, gracias.

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Querido, thank you for weaving all the pieces together. Thank you for this beautiful anthology, you've worked your magic.

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And of course, much love to our querida Lupe Gallegos-Diaz and esteemed Jere Takahashi. For all the work you've both done with undocumented students since the start, gracias. For always reminding us that we must learn to think with our corazón, the heart can always serve as a compass to a life well lived. You have been a bridge for many of us, and a force of magic in this world.

I am grateful for all the corazón in this anthology, it has all been a good remedio to us. For all that has been good to us during this process, I am grateful. It has been an opening of the heart, a collective esfuerzo entre familia.

Marco Antonio Flores, Editor
The personal narratives, poems, and art in this volume are extremely powerful testimonies to the grit and courage of undocumented youth, as well as to their ardent belief in the American Dream even in a time when the Dream has become more elusive for many citizens. Their stories resonate with my own experiences and those of my American-born parents and immigrant grandparents, who were classified by the U.S. government as “aliens ineligible for citizenship.”

These stories also mesh with my own scholarly passions. I have dedicated my academic energies to explicating processes of exclusion and oppression and to documenting histories of resistance and political struggle by people of color. However, until 2009, I was unaware of the plight of undocumented students. I am grateful to Marco Antonio Flores, a student in one of my undergraduate Gender & Women’s Studies course who revealed his status to me, making me aware for the first time of the presence of “invisible” AB 540 students at Cal. I learned about his struggles to remain at and get through Cal without financial aid and access to legal jobs. I learned that many AB 540 students suffered periods of homelessness, hunger, and having to withdraw from school because they lacked money for tuition: all the while fearing exposure and deportation.

Over the next couple of years, I observed the growing public activism of undocumented students in Texas, California, and Illinois who organized to fight against deportations and to support federal immigration reform. Congressional supporters of immigration reform have held up college student Dreamers as paragons because they have done all the right things: became fluent English speakers, studied hard, and prepared themselves to be able to contribute their talents and ability to the American economy. Undocumented student activists generally have eschewed this argument because they recognize it draws new lines of exclusion against other members of their families and communities— those who were unable to continue schooling or those who toil as day workers, agricultural workers, or in other low paying irregular employment. They therefore stand with the immigrant rights movement in calling for more comprehensive immigration reform. Additionally, queer undocumented students challenged the “ideal American” myth by coming out and challenging the heterosexist construction of the good citizen and troubling the simplistic notion that being undocumented is the primary or only identity they have. The growth of queer undocumented activism is reflected in this anthology.

The testimony of Ju Hong, one of the first Asian undocumented students to come out
publicly and engage in an act of public civil disobedience is an important reminder that not all undocumented immigrants are Latina/o. According to the estimates by the UC Office of the President, in the University of California system, Asians constitute at least half of undocumented student population. The current pervasive stereotype of the “illegal immigrant” is of Mexican or other Latina/o background, but historically, the “illegal alien” was Asian. Starting in 1882 with the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act and continuing with the 1924 Immigration Act, legal entry was closed to immigrants from the Asian sub-continent. Asians trying to get into the U.S. had to use various subterfuges to evade the law, including entry via Mexico! These ruses created a tradition of secrecy and shame about legal status, which continues to the present. Ju has shown tremendous courage in speaking out about his status.

It has also been inspiring for me to be part of a coalition of organizations and individuals on the Center for Race and Gender/Center for Latino Policy Research project to improve the campus climate for AB540 students including sponsoring the writing workshop that led to this anthology and research report. Importantly AB540 students have been their own best advocates. Their mobilization spurred the legislature to pass the California Dream Act that gives them access to state financial aid, and moved UC Berkeley Chancellor Robert J. Birgeneau to create the Haas Dreamers Resource Center dedicated to provide comprehensive support for AB540 students. Congratulations and well done!

Evelyn Nakano Glenn  
Director, Center for Race and Gender at UC Berkeley  
Professor, Ethnic Studies and Gender & Women’s Studies
Almost thirty years ago I entered the University of California at Berkeley hoping that with a good education I would be able to improve my life. I had already been living in the United States for more than a decade, had been elected captain of the traffic squad at Woodland Elementary and student body president at John C. Fremont High School in East Oakland. Like the student writers whose works are included in this book, I was eager to prove what I was worth to this country, willing to work beyond what was seemingly possible to show that I was more than what my legal status defined me as—undocumented.

Every day, during those first few semesters at Cal, I toiled in silence. I scheduled all my classes in the mornings so that I could hurry home in the afternoon, eat a quick
snack, and board the 82B AC Transit bus to San Leandro. It was usually at midnight when I would return from my late shift at Chuckburgers. I would then sit at the kitchen table to do my homework, the salsa-stained pages of my English and calculus books spread open in front of me, while mamá, papá, and my siblings slept in the next room.

Each morning, after mamá prepared my beans and coffee, I would walk to the Coliseum BART station and seek out the quietest corner on the platform. I tried to read, still sleepy from the night before, always wary that at any point any official’s question about my national origin could unravel all of the work I had done at school. Then, like the news of an unexpected but considerable inheritance left by some unknown, long-lost relative, amnesty arrived.

Even the daily plate of pinto beans mamá served us each morning tasted better that Spring. Amnesty became a beautiful term. Whenever we heard it mentioned on the Ten O’clock News we smiled at what it meant. When we went to Saint Elizabeth’s Church on Sundays, we all stood a little taller while waiting in line to take our communion. Papá even gave an extra dollar during the donation. It really did seem as if all of our problems were about to be solved, as if we too would soon be joining the ranks of middle-class Americans who owned mortgages and took yearly trips to Disneyland each summer.

But after more than a year since our amnesty application had been processed, months after I had received that green plastic card my family had coveted for more than a decade, I still didn’t know how to talk to others about the fact that I had been undocumented. Though I had been only one of millions of immigrants who had taken advantage of the amnesty provision in the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, I still felt ashamed about confessing my past to my friends at Berkeley. Deep down I feared that they would not really understand. After all, hadn’t we all been repeatedly told in one class after the other that the one thing valued most of all at Berkeley was academic honesty? How could I trust that my friends would still be there if I now confessed that I had once violated the rules? Wasn’t the fact that I had once been “illegal” akin to plagiarizing or cheating?

Still, figuring out a way for me to tell my undocumented immigrant story became an obsession. From the start, as I sat in my political science and ethnic studies courses, I became convinced that any conversation about American identity was incomplete without a discussion of all those undocumented immigrants who had chosen to make the United States their home. Someone, I strongly believed, needed to write about that deep desire that I, and other immigrants like myself, felt for attaining the privileges of American citizenship.

In Barbara Christian’s course on African American literature I learned about W.E.B DuBois’ Souls of Black Folk and became immediately fascinated by his concept of double consciousness. Like the black folk DuBois discussed in his masterful work, I too felt possessed by “two souls, two thoughts, and two unreconciled strivings.” When Professor Christian introduced us to Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man, I was certain that I had found my calling. I wanted to write about my own days as an invisible immigrant kid growing up in East Oakland, how I yearned to become an undocumented
immigrant Black Panther, to fight for social justice for poor people such as my parents.

So it was that in the Fall of 1988, two years after I had declared the English major, I enrolled in three simultaneous courses I was certain would equip me to write the story of my undocumented immigrant experience. Today, those three teachers whom I had the good fortune of taking are regarded as titans of Chicana/o literature. But back then, in 1988, Sandra Cisneros, Cherríe Moraga, and Gary Soto were important to me because they were the locksmiths who were finally going to help me unbolt that strongbox in which I kept all of my immigrant experiences hidden.

Now that I think about it, that Fall of 1988 was probably the most exciting semester I ever experienced as a Berkeley undergraduate. I relished every moment I spent with my writing instructors. I learned that carefully chosen details describing visceral memories could help me communicate a greater number of deep truths about being undocumented than any political treatise I could ever muster, no matter how fiery or flowery my language could be. Good stories were always centered on what real people lived, Cherríe Moraga would often state at the start of her class, not on what political ideologies they believed.

Figure 3. Alberto Ledesma, Writing courses were sites of terror... (2013)

Each lecture complemented the other, reaffirmed what had already been discussed in a previous class. Good stories, they all agreed, were made by creating immediate human connections, by using precise words to reconstruct experienced realities. My life in East Oakland could be understood by any reader if I communicated what I had lived in clear and concrete details: The smell of café con leche that always greeted me in the morning; Pedro Infante’s crooning Cien Años from my father’s portable radio; my mother’s calloused hand making the sign of the cross on my forehead each
morning when I left for school. I wanted to write what being undocumented felt like and now I was learning how to do it.

Except that, in the end, I could not muster the courage to go ahead with it.

To be sure, that semester when I was enrolled in those three writing courses I learned more about creative writing than I had ever expected. In fact, it was because of all the advice and support that each of my writing teachers gave me that I won U.C. Irvine’s Chicano/Latino Literary Prize for Poetry in 1988.

I still remember how much I stuttered when the lady who had called with the news told me that I had won first place. The check I was going to receive for writing a dozen or so poems was more than what my father made in two weeks of working graveyard at the foundry. Then my heart sank when she said that I was supposed to fly down to receive the prize in person, that a high-level university administrator was going to give it to me.

I vaguely recall saying that my mother was about to have a serious operation and that I couldn’t leave her side. That’s how afraid I still was about being found out as an undocumented immigrant. To receive a Chicano award, I imagined them insisting, I had to prove that I was “Mexican American.” Even though my family had been granted amnesty years before, I still declined the free airfare and lodging. The irony is that I had not written anything about being undocumented. And that too was the rub. Eventually, I even had to visit a therapist to help me wrestle with the guilt of winning an award for a work in which I did not write what I really wanted to.

Writing about being undocumented is no easy feat. It can only be done when the writer has figured out a way to set aside an internal editor the size of Goliath. It can only be done when the writer has made the irrevocable choice to trust that her reader will respect her vulnerability. This is why I absolutely admire what the writers included in this book have accomplished. I know that the psychological challenge each of them has had to overcome to put pen to paper has been enormous. I know that each word that they have selected represents a gigantic act of courage, a revolution against the unrelenting pressure to remain silent within a society that prides itself on its supposed democratic ideals.

And yet, for all the revolutionary insight that their works have generated, the most important effect that Miriam Avilez, Marco Antonio Flores, Andrea Guerrero, Montzerrat Garcia, Ju Hong, Gabriela Monico, Alejandro Jimenez, Humberto Ortiz, Chantiri Ramirez, and Linda Azucena Sánchez have conjured has been a necessary healing. They show us that even amid struggle and despair, words have the power to repair wounds, to make us understand how humanity can transcend even the most polarized of ideological debates.

In effect, their achievement is not a small one. Like those brave young people in Greensboro, North Carolina, who opted for civil disobedience in 1960 in order to resist the scourge of segregation, so have these writers chosen to take the witness chair to stand up against all the stereotypes used to vilify undocumented immigrants living in the United States.
Each of the writers included in this volume has worked with an individual editor. The object, however, has not been to homogenize their writing and inoculate it against grammatical and stylistic unorthodoxy. Rather, the editorial aim has been to maintain each writer’s authenticity while enhancing the clarity of each story being told. It would be a mistake to regard any awkwardly perceived turn of phrase as a sign of a writer’s lack of maturity. This is accented art, writing that emerges from the intersection of cultures. The very act of publishing their works represents a kind of poetic justice.

Often, among activists, social change is thought to be the end product of “telling truth to power.” These writers also believe in social change; but, for them, power is not static. Power is an active force that can be persuaded to act positively or negatively. Power experiences caprices, can deport anyone on a whim. It is a thing to be feared when it is not understood. And yet, power can also be reasonable. It can change society, create policy changes when it recognizes injustice, it can feel compassion. These writers know that power exists in all of us. This is why they are sharing their works with us. So that we may act on their behalf. I hope that you enjoy their stories as much as I have.

*Alberto Ledesma, PhD*

*Berkeley, California*
“Our Undocumented Lives”

Marco Antonio Flores

We have suffered
the silence of our voices
the separation of our families

Tonight, we rise
with a vision
with corazón

Tonight,
we are a pueblo
in prayer

Tonight,
I am dreamin’
of poetic justice

Tonight,
I am reminded to dream,
to awaken the
ture heart of bravery

Tonight,
no American Dream
will be served
only blood, bread, and poetry.
“We dared to think we could collect Our dreams and make them realities by living life without papers, and we did.”
My Nights at Eshleman

Gabriela Monico

Last year on a hot summer afternoon I met up with my friend Antonio to go get burritos at Pancho’s. At the bus stop, we started talking about the scholarship interview we both had the week before. I kept listening inattentively until he said:

“Yeah, I mentioned to the committee how we used to spend the nights at Eshleman Hall. It’s funny remember? How we would freak out about getting caught.”

When I heard the word Eshleman, images of the third floor, the smelly girl’s bathroom and lonely halls at midnight flooded my mind.

I had forgotten about that chapter in my life. Sometimes I try to block painful memories. But fortunately, Antonio reminded me of them.

It was the first semester of my sophomore year. I could no longer bear commuting late at night, walking through the dark and empty streets of West Oakland, especially after being chased on my way home. I was at the corner of Union and 12th Street when all of a sudden I see a man biking from afar. He gets closer, and closer. Then he yells at me. I was so scared that I couldn’t remember any of the words he said. He got off his bike and started running after me. Luckily, I was only a couple of blocks away from home. I ran as fast as I could.

“FIRE! FIRE!” I yelled

And people started looking out their windows. The man stopped chasing me as I started desperately knocking on the door of the house where I used to live in and screaming; “OPEN THE DOOR, PLEASE!” with tears in my eyes. Scariest experience ever.

I decided to ‘move in’ to Eshleman after the incident. Around the same time, I learned that my friend Antonio didn’t have a place to live. I suggested that we both spend some nights at one of the student offices in the building. The first days were rough but soon we got used to the routine. I would sleep on this old yellow couch and he would sleep on the carpeted floor. At 5am, the Latina in charge of cleaning the offices would come to take out the trash. She reminded me of my mother. Always wearing a ponytail, comfortable t-shirts and jeans.

Every time we heard the door to the hall opening, we just had to make sure to be awake and pretend to be on the computer or something. We tried to be extremely friendly with her when she came into the office.

Antonio would compliment her on her dedication to her hard, back breaking job.
“Como está señora? Que duro trabaja usted.”

“Si mire, la vida del pobre” the woman would say.

“It’s crazy how we used to do that. Sigh. The life of an undocumented student,” he said between bites. Antonio was almost done eating his burrito.

I nodded.

Antonio said, “Haha. Remember how one day we were so sick of waking up at 5am that we were like ‘fuck this’ and did not care if the lady would see us sleeping?”

“Yeah.”

As we walked out of the restaurant, I looked around and wondered how many other undocumented students have done what Antonio and I did. I’m sure there are many.
Diary of a College Girl

Linda Azucena Sánchez

It is 4:00 am already. Classes, work, meetings, library, life! ¡Respira! I often get criticized by many. “¡Sal a divertirte! ¿Qué chiste tiene vivir la vida si no la disfrutas?” I try to take such advice to heart, but I struggle. My honest love for academia and my hunger for knowledge stem from the history I have with the lack of educational opportunities I was offered back in my humble village.

Dad says que soy su “galla,” an unconquerable xingona. He may be right. Yet, lately, I’m feeling so impotent. I am unsure of what to do with myself. Should I cry out of desperation? Be angry? But with who? In the midst of my anger, frustration, and all I start to question my very own identity as a “DREAMER.” I reflect and look back at how undocumented students in higher education have become an icon of excellence.

In the course to be recognized and our existence acknowledged and accepted, we, I, some of us, willingly accepted to become icons of excellence and perfection. I am no longer an individual; rather I am a DREAMER that possesses no complexities or intersectionalities. I am merely an icon that has been successful at obscuring the existence of those who are not “at par” with those like me. I am a DREAMER that continues to serve as a most useful tool in systematically oppressing and excluding the other sixty-three percent that are not that “inspirational” and hence not worthy of a chance.

My peers who do not fit within this Dreamer paradigm have been silenced, neglected, and ignored. Their stories are never exposed, much less narrated because exposing their stories and thus acknowledging their existence is political suicide, some argue. They invalidate the struggles of these students and shame them by bragging about the stories of the “successful” ones.

Politically, they claim, it’s not smart to expose the diversity and complexities that exist within undocumented individuals. Let’s not complicate things, some argue.

I constantly find myself dwelling on these internal conflicts. I have a sad feeling that undocumented students in higher education have been stereotyped a certain way. To many, the dreamer epitomizes the much-desired American dream; it is the idea that hard work will be rewarded in the end. For others, the DREAMERS is simply an icon that can be paraded yet denied the right to feel human and the right to be seen as such.

I am undocumented. Yet there are other things that compose my being and my identity. I am more than a political icon and above all, I AM HUMAN.
Figure 4. Alberto Ledesma, *A Dreamer’s Gift* (2013)
Figure 5. Julio Salgado, *Your mind is sacred/Care for it and protect it* (2013)
Statement By Ju Hong
UC Berkeley Dream Act Student

“If not us, then who? If not now, then when? – John Lewis

My name is Ju Hong, and I am undocumented and unafraid.

On Tuesday, July 12, 2011, six other undocumented students and I took part in an act of civil disobedience to empower young undocumented immigrant youth and to protest the inhumane treatment of immigrants. We sat in the street adjacent San Bernardino Valley College and submitted to arrest. We were taken to jail, and we are now being threatened with deportation. This is the first time in California, where undocumented youth participated in non-violent civil disobedience. I am also the first Asian American undocumented student in the country to participate in a civil disobedience action.

We chose to protest in San Bernardino County because organizations like the National Socialist Party (Nazis), the Minutemen, and anti-immigrant legislators have been terrorizing the immigrant communities. In San Bernardino, a 17-year old student was arrested and deported simply because he was riding his bike without the headlights on. Another student was arrested and deported because he was playing basketball on campus late at night. Where is the justice? Why are so many talented immigrant youth being targeted?

After our arrest, we were held in jail for almost 12 hours. All seven of us were confined to a single cell room with one toilet, one roll of toilet paper, and two long wooden benches. As I cowered against the icy concrete, I felt goose bumps all over my body. Light headed, and my stomach in knots that night spent in jail was miserable.

Despite physical and mental battles, one of the youngest participants, 19-year-old Jorge Herrera, led the unity clap inside the cell. With our eyes closed, we followed by the rhythm of the clap. I shouted, ‘Isang Bagsak!’ a Filipino unity cry, “one down, one fall!” — meaning we must stand together and fight for justice. Even in jail, the room was filled with energy and strong determination.

Several hours later, an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officer came to our cell to interrogate us. The ICE agent looked directly at me and said, “I will not detain you today, but I will detain you soon.” In reality, the ICE agent had the authority to deport us, at that precise moment — to separate us from our family and friends, and to send us to a country that is foreign to us.
ICE was notified because of the “secure communities” program that allows local law enforcement to share information with ICE so that they may initiate deportation proceedings. This is an unjust program, because it leaves immigrant communities vulnerable and distrustful of the police.

A year ago, my family’s home was burglarized. The door was broken into pieces, the windows were completely shattered, and our valuable belongings were gone. My family was terrified. My immediate reaction was to call the police, but my mother stopped me. “Ju, do not call the police,” she said. “What if you get deported?”

Like many other undocumented immigrants, I was living in the shadows and in constant fear of deportation. However, I have decided to stand up and fight back. I am sick and tired of remaining silent. Today, I am proclaiming to the world that I am undocumented and unafraid.

In the next couple of weeks, I will find out if ICE will start removal proceedings on our cases. If ICE does decide to put me in deportation proceedings, I will take full action and I will fight until I regain my basic human rights.

I risked my life because I wanted to empower other young undocumented youth. In particular, I strongly encourage my fellow Asian American undocumented youth to take the next step and come out of the shadows. Start sharing your personal story to your friends, your relatives, your counselors, and your communities. This is only way we can empower our communities and fix our broken immigration system.

I risked my life because I wanted to show that this is not only a Latino issue; in fact, this is a human rights issue. I hope we can stand united as a movement, and not let divisions hurt our work.

We are calling on President Barack Obama to stop the deportation of all undocumented students throughout the country. Please join us.

This is our home, this is our country, and we want to contribute to make this nation a better place.

You can make our dreams come true. Thank you.

Isang Bagsak,  
Ju Hong
Figure 6. Julio Salgado, *Do the right thing Obama* (2011)
Figure 7. Alberto Ledesma, *There is no ‘back of the line’* (2014)
Our Dream

Alejandro Jimenez

Car engines were off and running. The machinery of the big city was getting louder. This is la Ciudad de Mexico in 1994. I was in first grade and my brother in third. He took me with him to his class where I was able to see bigger books and more writing on the chalkboard. This was exciting to me because school was important. All my brother and I were told was that school was important.

“¡Cuidas a tu hermanito mio! ¡No le sueltes la mano cuando vayan en camino!” Said mama to my brother.

Mi mama is telling my brother to take care of me because we are heading to his school where his teacher allowed him to bring me along to school for a day. My memory is blurry but I know one thing, school was important.

The beginning of my educational journey started there with my brother on that day.

“Voy a la escuela Profesor Luis Guevara Ramirez” I would tell anyone who asked me. I knew the name of my school, it was something more than school pride.

I was in the first grade and the school was near some new housing developments. They were squatter communities converted into some type of low income housing; it was not the best part of town. Our school was old, formed of big buildings with red bricks. Our newest renovation when I attended was a second set of stairs. It made for easier student flow when class was out and all the crowded classrooms spilled students back into the streets.

At the start of the school day, the teacher did the daily routine.

“Atas tardes estudiantes. Por favor saquen papel y lapiz…” La maestra would give us orders and we listened; word around class was that she was the type to pull your ear if you stepped out of line.

I was in the afternoon block, so my brother and I wouldn’t start school until afternoon. The school I went to in Mexico didn’t have the type of funding like schools in California do. Back then I had to bring my own paper, pencils, pens, coloring pencils, crayons, glue sticks, ruler etc. These are some basic educational needs that hold back many young mexicanos trying to get an education. Without them one falls behind and is left out of the classroom activities.

“¡¡Mira, mira, mis colores y mi saca puntas y mis plumas!!” My enthusiasm was genuine when I had all the supplies, a little nerd I was.
My grandma had bought my brother and me new school supplies and I was showing them to my desk partner before class started. I didn’t even have a real backpack but I had a sack made of cloth and shoe laces that worked perfectly.

It was always nice when mi mama would send money to us from the U.S because it meant my brother and I would get upgrades such as real back packs. In Mexico, if you want to complete all your school work you must first labor for your basic school materials like paper and pencils.

Each day class started when the teacher walked in. We began by pulling out a sheet of paper and writing the date.

“Hoy es 10 de octubre de 1994.” I whispered it to myself as I wrote it down on the top left.

That one year in the Mexican education system was of much value. It was a reference point that would allow me to appreciate American schools much more when I got to Los Angeles.

I enjoyed school, even after leaving Mexico I enjoyed school. We moved to Los Angeles and my transition was not easy. There were problems getting me enrolled into the right grade. L.A.U.S.D wanted me in 3rd grade, but I had been in 1st grade back in Mexico.

“Señorita, es importante que mi hijo no pierda el segundo grado, le va ayudar mucho para aprender inglés.”

Mi mama made things happen, she was not going to let her son skip a grade so she went to the school herself to make sure I was in the right class. My brother started in 3rd grade and I in 2nd. Trinity Street Elementary school was a dream come true; there were school provided lunches, I had a backpack, and Fridays we had pizza. Perfect attendance was rewarded with free ice cream. It was all a dream.

“Nos vamos a mudar con tu tio.”

I was ready to attend Middle School when mama told us we had to move. The neighborhood was getting more dangerous the closer we got to teen age, and finding work was tough. We left Los Angeles on a Friday and headed north. I was disappointed that I would be leaving my friends and my school behind.

“Tú ponle ganas porque eres inteligente, no tienes otro trabajo mas que salir bien en tus clases y prepararte para la universidad” Mi mama would say it as I wondered what it all meant given that in my mind no papers meant no college.

In San Jose I didn’t like school as much. High School was a really difficult period. Between being called a wetback and failing the exit exam several times I was losing hope. These were the years when information for undocumented youth was impossible to ask for. But I knew mama’s dream was to see my brother and I get educated. She reminded us even on the days I was sent home for getting in trouble she reminded us. I made it through high school somehow and enrolled in community college. I was not sure what for but it was worth a try.
Mi mama had the right idea all along, the right dreams however don’t come with instructions. Her wishes of seeing me in college were genuine, but nobody can prepare you for the hardships of going to college without papers or financial assistance. My first year in community college I heard many stories and saw many tears at student–counselor meetings; people failing math classes and other subjects that others may have learned in middle school.

“Tú nomás enfócate y héchale ganas,” mi mamá kept saying.

Nothing prepares you for being an undocumented student even in community college. The memories of childhood dreams, memories of my mom’s words are what kept me going when I felt I’d hit dead ends and brick walls each semester.

James Baldwin used to say that “to get an education under those circumstances is a tremendous act of the will.” The circumstances he spoke of are the circumstances undocumented students still face today. The struggle of undocumented students exposed a will power I never knew existed within us. This will power for me had a long history beginning in Mexico in my brother’s classroom, it grew strength even as I struggled to learn English, and it was maintained by the love of mi mama.

We dared to think we could collect Our dreams and make them realities by living life without papers, and we did. Together with my brother and my mom, we came to UC Berkeley from La Ciudad de México.
Even at eight years old I was already contemplating what being undocumented meant in my life. I knew that living outside the bounds of civic society was affecting me somehow. It would be many years later, while still in graduate school that I would finally accept that I was an undocumented immigrant philosopher lost as always.

Figure 8. Alberto Ledesma, *Breaking down my lived experience into its constituent parts* (2013)
Living the trailer lifestyle

Gabriela Monico

“So yes, though ‘home’ permeates every sinew and cartilage in my body, I too am afraid of going home.”

-Gloria Anzaldúa

Me llaman la traicionera because I have never been attached to my family, especially after I moved to college. At this point my relatives don’t even ask why I don’t go back to visit.

The truth is that I am afraid of going ‘home’ to Azusa. It feels like… a PHOBIA. I haven’t had a word with my dad since last Christmas. The last thing he said to me was that I won’t go to heaven because I’ve chosen to disengage from all forms of institutionalized religion.

“Fine” I said. “We’ll see each other in hell, then.”

That was over the phone. The last time I went back to Azusa was to attend a scholarship banquet last summer. Anxiety overwhelmed me as I got in the bus. My hands were sweating and I couldn’t stop thinking about the past during that 8 hour bus ride. Bad memories kept coming and going. Don’t get me wrong, I am proud of who I am and where I come from, but going back brings unwanted thoughts.

I got home. As I walked into the trailer, I noticed that the way objects were arranged hadn’t changed since the last time I was there. The old dusty TV was in the same corner next to the couch where I used to sleep. My stepmother’s clothes were scattered all over the place. And the same kind of food was in the pantry: cup noodle soups, Mac n Cheese, Coca Cola bottles and sweet bread of all sorts. Cockroaches would occasionally run around the floor scaring Lola, the little Chihuahua that replaced Nemo, another Chihuahua that was run over by a car the year before.

As I looked around I felt as if I had returned to the past. I remembered it was in the trailer when my father felt frustrated about life and blamed his problems on other people. It was in the trailer when he told me that studying was not going to make me successful in life after I mentioned how afraid I was to take the AP History test the following day.

When I was in high school, I would go outside the trailer after 9pm, which was bedtime for my parents, to finish my homework with a tiny flashlight in the freezing winter cold. I was determined to finish those damned physics problems. One time
my dad was mad at me for staying up so late that he locked me out of the trailer. An hour later he walked out and without saying anything, he pushed me against the wall and tried to choke me.

Tears ran down my cheeks. It hurt. I couldn’t breathe.

“¡Déjala! Stop!” said my step-mother. Because she knew that she was the only person in this world that he would listen to. She knew that he cherished and valued her above anyone else, even his children.

Sometimes I cried in silence out of desperation when I was alone in the trailer. But I had made up my mind. My plan was to leave Azusa.

Eventually I left home and became the first person in my family to attend college. I have survived poverty, homelessness, registration blocks, humiliation…I have learned how to live with pain in a nation that doesn’t want me here.

Pero los fantasmas del pasado van y vienen. I heard that my father only works a few hours a week. My step mother was fired back in February from the thrift store where she worked after her boss started checking employees’ status. Since then, they’ve been selling tacos whenever they can to make ends meet.

Pero la lucha sigue. Yo sigo aquí con la cabeza en alto y con una extra dosis de ganas. ¿Por qué?

Porque quiero hacer felices a mi bisabuela y a todos las matriarcas de la familia que vinieron y se fueron de este mundo antes que yo.

Porque no quiero que mis padres y mis hermanos sigan viviendo así.

Porque se puede y se quiere.

Things will change, I promise. One day we will cease to be foreigners trying to survive in the shadows. No hay mal que dure cien años ni cuerpo que lo resista.
Figure 9. Alberto Ledesma, *One dreamer, many dreams* (2014)
“Y así fue como llegó la hora de decírtelo.
adios, Madre Patria.”
Las camisas con caricatura

Alejandro Jimenez

I see my college friends count down for years to 21. When we can finally read that sign at the club that says 21+ and smile with some swag like “yee that’s me.” I see my friends turn 21 and wonder about my momma. She crossed the border at 21, a young lady with the fight of a panther, alone and brave, flying through the border like a butterfly migrating north. She left her two little boys behind.

***

It was still dark outside and I could feel the morning cold; my brother and I had to wake up but we both had trouble pulling off abuelita’s warm heavy blanket. It was somewhere around five in the morning as we awoke. Mi abuelita paced the kitchen having already cooked breakfast.

“¿Ya nos vamos al aeropuerto?”

I didn’t fully understand what my brother said, but he was asking my grandma something about the “ae-reo-puerto”. Who cares, I threw myself back into the warmth of my brother and the blanket.

“Les preparé unos huevos para desayunar hijitos!”

In my mind I knew eggs did not just mean eggs. Mi abuelita has always made wholesome meals out of simple ingredients. When mom sent money from California we could afford buying cereal and even pancake mix. Not this morning. Fortunately mi abuela was thoughtful and creative with her food. She had survived different generations of Mexican poverty so by now she was a creator, and inventor—she was a facilitator of peace and comfort with any meal she cooked for you.

“!!Ya llegaron los reyes magos chiquillos!!” “No quieren ver lo que les trajieron los reyes?”

Mi tío was a funny dude, but we still didn’t want to wake up. It was too early. Much too early to cross the border.

Uncle wanted to wake us up because he knew we needed to be sharp and ready. He had traveled to Michoacán and back to La Ciudad de Mexico enough times to hear the rumblings and stories of the border. Nogales, Tijuana, Arizona, he had never been there but he understood it as a place of danger, of reward, where the stakes are higher.

“¡Despierta!” my brother tugged at my shoulder.

Suddenly I snapped out of my sleep and went over to the kitchen table.
“P…pen-sil, ken, win-do. Me escuchaste? yo ya hablo Ingles” I said to my brother as we became more aware that we were leaving for the U.S. We felt thankful the schools we had attended in Mexico taught us English, we definitely felt ready to ask for a pen anywhere we went.

We ate and slowly labored putting on one layer of clothing after another, fighting the cold and tying each shoe string carefully. We often left the house looking like twins wearing identical attires. Today it was pairs of blue jeans and button ups made of comic strip fabric.

My younger uncles were awake too and they also needed to eat their desayuno.

“Hoy vamos a ver a mi mama, ¿verdad abuelita?” I asked my grandma

The day before, as I anticipated the trip to the U.S I wondered what I would call my mom once I met her again. Would I call her mama, or would I need to speak English to her?

“I will just wait and see what my brother calls her,” I thought to myself. I was asked frequently if I missed mama. I always said yes, but really I was too young to truly understand how far away she was. I knew she was not home but always thought of her nearby. But on this day, mama was closer than ever before, if we could just cross safely and reunite.

“¿Por qué tienen tantos cuadritos mi camisa?” My brother scrunched his face as he asked.

“Tú vistete mijito” Abuelita said as she turned the tortilla on the comal.

I had asked mi abuelita with sincere curiosity. She didn’t bother to explain what the shirts would do, but you could see a pensive look in her eyes. We knew abuelita was getting ready to say goodbye. She hugged us, we were her first grandchildren who were about to embark on a trip to the U.S. My brother and I were unsure of when we would see her again.

“Los quiero mucho mijitos” Abuelita said as her eyes filled up.

My older tío came in, through the doorway you could hear the engine of an old Volkswagen Beetle pounding smog into the air.

“¡Vámonos! ¡Vámonos! Hay tráfico para llegar al aereopuerto.”

Tío was always taking the lighter side of the situation, he never failed to make us feel everything would be ok.

“Se ven bien chidos los dos eh, se portan bien cuando lleguen al otro lado muchachitos.” Tío insisted in telling us we were headed for a life change of some sort.

The cartoon strip fabric used to make our shirts was an idea heard through the grapevine. One of my tios had learned that American kids wore shirts with cartoons. We lived in a community where migrating north was becoming somewhat common, tips for crossing the border were being handed down from party to party.
It was a time when television images were being promoted on clothing. Cartoons on kids’ clothing was yet another tip that got handed down. It seemed to be the trend in the U.S.A.

My uncle was the youngest of my mom’s siblings, he was a teenager who loved Metallica. He told my grandma that la migra would not suspect anything if they saw us wearing cartoons on our clothes because little American kids wore it regularly. I always wonder if he meant to say that kids wore t-shirts of Bugs Bunny or Batman or Animaniacs, all of which were popular cartoons in the early 90s. My grandma opted for cartoon strip fabric and she made a pair of shirts herself.

“Se van a ir con sus tíos a Tijuana…”

Mi abuelita prepared us for this trip, she had already dressed us. She looked worried, yet she gave us every detail of this trip as if everything was normal and natural.

Tío was to fly with us to Tijuana, at that point he would go in a different direction, and my brother and I would ride into the other side under the guise and protection of someone else’s documents.

It was a different time at the border, there weren’t minute men or the high dangers of today. Mis tíos crossed the way everyone else did, running and ducking and jumping. Their athletic ability was their strongest weapon in the desert, running through the hills is a life or death gamble. People in the U.S hardly take into account the human need that would lead millions to take that gamble.

Mama was already in Los Angeles and she knew the right people. Those people made sure my brother and I weren’t at the mercy of the desert.

Everything happened in one day, my brother and I were afraid of what might happen, but I don’t think we truly understood the dangers of the border..

“Wow. Ven a ver ” I said out loud as we took off and began flight.

“Quiero ver, déjame ver la ventana.” My brother also wanted to see what everything looked like from above the clouds.

We arrived in Tijuana, it was hot, the streets felt hollow, dirt roads and boarded up houses. Dirt roads and empty houses surrounded ours. We waited for the next leg of the trip. Finally our ride had arrived, a young looking couple, we played the role of their kids, we looked like a picture perfect middle class family just out for a trip.

The migra checked the van, dogs sniffed and agents searched for possible illegal items. They found none.

“No digas nada” my brother whispered as we stood on the side of the van.

We all waited silently as our driver and his wife did their work. Body searches and dog sniffin, the border is a puzzle, I thought. We are solving this puzzle. Finally we jumped in the van again, time to go. As soon as the migras gave the green light we never looked back.
“Ya estuvo, ya estuvo,” said our surrogate parents. We had just crossed the big bad border.

Danger seemed to be over and we crossed over. Las camisas con caricaturas had done their magic, mi abuelita had made them perfect and the migras let us go right through. We ate in the back of the van as I looked out the window. We passed a road sign that read “San Diego City Limits.” I fell asleep.

“Qué pasó muchachos, ya llegamos a Los Angeles.” Brother and I woke up and stared at each other.

“Ya llegamos, ven, córrele” the wife of our driver yelled out the window. My brother and I woke up and began to get off, we stepped off the van. The street was hot and smoggy, there was graffiti in the distance.

“MAMA!!” We yelled as we saw her, she walked towards us, you could see the joy in her face.

Mi jefita tenía 24 para entonces.
Figure 10. Alberto Ledesma, *Little Diego, Dreamer Boy* (2013)
Fear has always been part of my life. It was there resting next to me like a well-worn pillow that night as we crossed the Tijuana border in the back seat of some white lady’s red Camaro. I had tried to feign being asleep, had rested my head against the car’s door when the lady slowed down at the inspection station and a man’s head leaned into the cabin to check if we were indeed her exhausted American kids. I tried not to breathe as the man’s flashlight surveyed my sister and I passed out on the hot vinyl seat. I almost opened my eyes when I felt the warmth of a hand approaching my hair, but I stayed still, frozen by the knowledge of what we were actually doing. Even without opening my eyelids I realized how incongruent my sister and I must have appeared to the man. My black hair, torn white shirt, and dusty sneakers staining the pristine car like the squashed mosquitoes on the window. I wondered what the man must have thought of my sister’s tight braids, the polyester dress and patent leather shoes mamá had put on her before she kissed us goodbye and said “see you on the other side.” I wondered if the man actually paid any attention to the slow death he was causing us. Then the lady’s Camaro sped up, faster and faster as it rode on the smooth road. I was convinced that the man would call ahead, maybe to San Diego or Oceanside to have the car stopped because it was so obvious that we didn’t fit.

Figure 11. Alberto Ledesma, Border fear (2014)
June 26th, 2012

Querida abuelita,

Pues ya sabes, siempre vengo a visitarte cuando necesito una esquinita de confesión. Te quería contar que en unos meses me voy a San Diego a comenzar una nueva vida y me puse a pensar mucho en ti. Me gustaría que estuvieras conmigo para celebrar because I know que hubieras estado muy feliz.

Sabes, a veces me imagino que estás aquí. Sueño que estoy sentada a tu lado en el sofá viejito de madera por la entrada de tu casa, en el mismo cuarto donde tuvimos tu velorio hace dieciocho años. Just like that day, I can see raindrops begin to fall on the unpaved street as I look through the open door. Hasta la fecha el olor de la lluvia me recuerda a ti. And when those first few drops make contact with the earth, es bueno cerrar los ojos para poder absorber bien el olor de las memorias.

En mis sueños estás tejiendo vestiditos y gorritas para los nietos como tanto te gustaba hacer, remember? Sometimes I just sit quietly with you, the silence enough to give me a sense of peace. I suddenly begin to feel like I am two years old again wrapped in the sanctuary of your rebozo and the softness of your words. Other times I come to you looking for guidance y quizás una cura o un remedio. In these dreams, these moments in time cuando nuestros espíritus existen en el mismo lugar, we can begin to heal together.

You also remind me that I come from a long history of mujeres fuertes: mamás, tías, abuelas, primas y comadres who suffered heartbreak after heartbreak and yet somehow found a way to pick-up the pieces and with them build a better future for their children. Sin dinero, sin hablar inglés, with husbands who cheat, who wound. Somehow they continue with fierce resiliency on their path towards survival each day.

Es que a veces no hay de otra que sobrevivir, and I think that’s how mi mamá found the courage para decirte adiós and bring us here. Ni me puedo imaginar qué tan difícil fue para ella, especially during those times when the Alzheimer’s got so bad that you started to forget who we were.

No te preocupes, even through the illness your stories and memories were not erased; they only left in order to revivir in another form. Se reencarnan en los pedacitos biográficos que me cuenta mi mamá y en los valores que nos has inculcado a través de ella. Con estos pedacitos empiezo a construir mi propio altar para ti – an
altar I continue to build with offerings in the form of actions. All this is with the hope of living my life the way you always wanted to: I will be educated. I will not be confined. I will be well.

I know that I can never erase the abuse inflicted upon your body and your spirit. Aún así yo sigo teniendo fe que en esta vida no es demasiado tarde para empezar a curar a nuestros antepasados. Y por eso I live this life in honor of the past. Estás son mis ofrendas para ti.

Con cariño,

Andrea
All of us came to this country to pursue our dreams.
But, the fact is that not all of us have been able to do it.

Figure 12. Alberto Ledesma, Reflecting on the fact that the poverty rate among certain immigrant communities is still high (2014)
On the Metaphysics of being undocumented

Just because you only value my arms and my back, it does not mean that I lack a mind with which to reflect on my condition. The truth is that I could write stories about the ways that exploitation sharpens a worker’s ability to see how society really works. But the kind of literacy I possess is not one you value; my voice is not one you can hear. Someday, it will be my children who will translate my experience in a fashion you will find hard to ignore.

Figure 13. Alberto Ledesma, On the Metaphysics of being undocumented, version 2 (2013)
De Cuzcatlán al Norte

Gabriela Monico

Cuzcatlán, tierra de oro y piedras preciosas. Día y noche sueño despierta con usted. Sabe, lo que me gusta es que cuando eso sucede las dos mil ochocientas y pico millas que me separan de usted madre, desaparecen mágicamente… mentalmente me transporto hacia sus brazos bien alzados hacia mí y siempre dispuestos a recibirme como una madre acoge a su hija pródiga

Me duele el alma haberla dejado. Yo le juro que el dejarle no fue parte de mis rabietas de niña traviesa, los impulsos de mi alma aventurera, o mis tendencias rebeldes. Déjeme explicarle como esto aconteció para que así las cosas estén claras entre usted y yo y para que no haya rencores a la hora que la pelona venga por mí y mi alma tenga que rendirle cuentas a Quetzalcoatl e Itzquezye.

Hace más de seis veranos, el teléfono sonó. Yo fui a recogerlo y en la otra línea estaba mi padre, llamándome desde la tierra de los sueños en la cual había estado viviendo por los últimos tres años. “Hija, tenés que venirte. Aquí hay muchas oportunidades en este lugar donde fluye leche y miel. En El Salvador rebalsa la miseria, la violencia y el dolor. Venite para que podás ser todo lo que yo no fui.”

Pasaron los días. Pasaron los meses. Las palabras de mi padre se me quedaron clavadas pero una parte de mi las ignoró y trató de pensar que fue solo un efecto de mi imaginación. Después de pensarle y repensarle, mi padre y mi madre decidieron un día que lo mejor para mí era irme a los United States a buscar suerte.

Un día martes, después de formular tantos planes, mi madre convirtió la plática en acción y nos llevó a mí y a mi hermano en nuestros mejores trajes a un lugar que más parecía una rica mansión de paredes blancas. Alzada de una estaca estaba una bandera de rayas rojas y estrellitas blancas en un cielo azul. Yo me incorporaba y veía como la bandera ondulaba en esa mañana fría de invierno mientras mi mamá seguía parada en una infinita fila de personas. Después de una eternidad logramos entrar al lugar para que nos hiciera preguntas un gringo.

“Recuerden que tienen que decir que vienen a los Estados Unidos a pasear. A visitar a Disneylandia por primera vez. No a quedarse” nos había dicho mi papa el día anterior.

Las piernas me temblaban porque a mí no me gustaba mentir. Pero mi familia
y yo éramos un equipo de ganadores, o al menos eso pensaba yo, y de ésta solo salíamos victoriosos. Después de hacerle a mi mami un mar de preguntas sobre la cuenta de banco, las propiedades y los negocios que no teníamos, el gringo nos pasó un papel del otro lado del vidrio y sin mirarnos a la cara nos dijo que nuestra aplicación no había sido aceptada. Inmediatamente llamó a la siguiente persona en la fila y continuó su rutina de trabajo como si nada.

“No te preocupes mami, será la próxima.”

Y la próxima vez pasó dos meses después. Denied.

Y otra vez intentamos de nuevo. Denied.

“La cuarta es la vencida” decía yo.

Mi mami ya estaba harta, pero finalmente se quedó boquiabierta cuando la mujer del otro lado del vidrio le dijo que las visas habían sido aceptadas.

Hasta la fecha me pregunto cómo es que eso pudo suceder. “Tal vez mi mami hizo un trato especial con dios, o tal vez fue a ver a una bruja. Eso no es de este mundo”, me decía a mí misma.

Y pues con visa y todo mi mami dijo que en unas semanas sería mi turno de irme porque ella tenía cuentas que ajustar y cosas que terminar. Tampoco era el turno de mi hermano porque él estaba muy chico.

Con el pasar de los días empecé a empacar quince años de alegrías y tristezas en dos pequeñas maletas. Llevaba mis pantalones favoritos de mezclilla, abrigos, camisas manga larga, el escapulario, la cadena, y la biblia que Sor Socorro me regaló, dos pares de zapatos, un par de libros de mitología cuzcateca…y por supuesto, un álbum de fotografías que hasta la fecha me han traído buenas memorias del pasado.

El día antes de partir le pedí a mi abuela que me llevara a ver la tumba de los mártires de la UCA, y el sepulcro de Monseñor Romero. Algo dentro de mí me decía que esa podría ser mi única y última oportunidad de visitar a los héroes cuyas historias leía en libros. Mi abuelita me miraba con unos ojos que evocaban locura de mi parte pero de todos modos me concedió mi deseo. Oh, que felicidad me llegó al alma cuando vi el jardín de rosas que le plantaron a los mártires!

Esa noche me fue imposible dormir. Nunca me hubiera imaginado que mi vida cambiaría de tan drástica manera. Me preguntaba qué sería de mí en cinco años o en diez. Me preguntaba qué tan distinta era la gente del norte a la gente de mi país. Me preguntaba si este nuevo lugar al que iba me acogería tan bien como mi madre tierra lo hizo al dar mi madre a luz.

Se llegaron las tres de la mañana. Mi abuelo maneja hacia el aeropuerto Comalapa.

Destino: Aeropuerto de Los Angeles (LAX)

Vuelo: 708
“Vuelo 708 a bordo” anunció la aeromoza.

Tiempo de irme. Tiempo de despedirme de mi mami, mi abuelo, mis tíos, mis amigas y amigos, mis muñecas de trapo, mis listones de colores. Tiempo de decir adiós a las tertulias y el pan dulce de la tarde, las estrellas en el pozo, El salvador del mundo, el puerto de la libertad, el olor de la molienda, el mango verde y los jocotes con alhuashte, las aves marías y los padres nuestros, las historias de fantasmas, las miradas pizpiretas y las travesuras de adolescente.

Y así fue como me llegó la hora de decirte adiós, Madre Patria.
Hide and Go Seek on the Otay Mesa Border

Miriam Avilez

I still could not believe I was wearing this new pair of LA Gear tennis shoes that my tío Roge brought me all the way from El Norte when he came to visit us in Queretaro only a couple days ago. I had initially been disappointed that they were not the light-up version, but the pink neon flower on the side that magically appeared when they were exposed to the sun quickly stole my heart. And I also liked the chunky pink laces. I was sure we were going somewhere important and special since I only received new shoes on special occasions.

Although I was five-years old when I found myself admiring my new, shiny, white and pink sneakers, I still remember sitting around the only available table with my two older sisters, mother, and uncle at Tacos Veloz in Tijuana.

I held my soft taco de pollo asado with one hand and with the other I tried catching the green salsa dripping from the greasy tortilla. It was pointless. This was a messy meal and it didn’t help that my mother, my two sisters, uncle, and I were so crowded around the small table that our elbows touched as we ate. I watched as people walked in and out of Tacos Veloz and was amazed at how fast the men in the kitchen worked. A cook caught my attention. He quickly added fresh guacamole to a perfectly folded grilled-steak burrito, just as my mother told me to remember a telephone number. “Acuerdátelo. Es el teléfono de tu tío,” she said when I asked her why I had to remember it. I meant to ask why again but I was too busy trying to rid myself of the burning sensation the green salsa had left on my lips. As I reached for my refresco de naranja I noticed that one of my shoe laces was untied. I decided not to tie it for fear of staining my new shoes. As the burning sensation left my lips I was about to ask where we were going, but tío Roge announced that it was time to go to the hotel room and that we would see him in San Diego.

It was just 7:30, but my mother had already sent my sisters and me to bed at the hotel room. I looked to my oldest sister, hoping she would protest. My oldest sister, Mari is only four years older than me, and she has always liked behaving like an adult so my mother has always let her have her way. To my disappointment, my oldest sister did not protest. Instead, she knelt down and began untwisting my laces. My second oldest sister, Yeni, only a year older than me, removed her shoes without untwisting them and let them drop on the floor. She then jumped on the hotel’s bed just like she did back at home. I watched her hop
up and down and wished to be more like her, not afraid of getting into trouble. As Mari asked Yeni to stop, Yeni landed on my arm. I didn’t dare complain, for if I did, Yeni would have surely pushed me off the bed we were sharing that night. Mari turned off the light and I made an effort to fall asleep on the old mattress. But its springs went off screeching every time I moved. I tossed and turned in my hopeless effort to fall asleep. I didn’t like the room: the cheap, dusty lamps and carpets with the peeling walls reminded me of the haunted places Mari talked about when we ate pan dulce and drank chocolate de abuelita out in the porch at my grandma’s house. I could not help but feel nostalgic for my grandma’s clean house which always smelled of Fabuloso.

The next morning I was abruptly awakened by my mother. I hurried up and used the palm of my hand to wipe the dust off of the window to see if the sun was out yet. I was sure I had only been sleeping for a few hours. It was pitch dark and I wondered why we were up so early. My mother asked me again, “¿Cuál es el número de teléfono que te enseñé?” Proudly, I recited the phone number and my mother zipped up my jacket. Were we going somewhere. I asked, “¿A dónde vamos?” My mother responded, “No se te olvide ese número.” My sisters, who were also wearing their brand new shoes and warm jackets, looked towards my mother and me, and asked, “¿Ya?” And we were off.

Obediently, and with no further questions we walked out into the cold to join a group of unfamiliar faces. Four men and two other women joined us. They were also wearing tennis shoes and heavy jackets. The men introduced themselves, but I was too cold to pay attention. I buried my face against my mother’s waist to keep my cheeks warm, but I still managed to hear one of the men say, “Me dicen Frijol. Y yo soy su coyote.”

We walked on rugged mountain terrain for what seemed like hours, passing behind abandoned trailer homes and rushing across cracked asphalt. We had been walking for a few hours when I realized my shoe-laces were untied again. I tried tying them, but my fingers were too numb from the cold. I caught up to Mari and pointed to my now dirty shoes. She triple-knotted my shoe laces and I told Mari, “Eso duele.” But she took no sympathy and responded in a serious voice, “Aguántate, vamos a caminar más.”

We continued walking up the steep and rocky hillsides. I was amazed at how fast Yeni made friends with the strangers. While my sister had been walking with the strangers in front of us I held my mother’s hand. We arrived to a muddied area and were asked to wait behind a patch of dried bushes. We huddled up and used the long branches to create walls around us. We shielded ourselves in what felt like a small closet. I saw Frijol walk away with a tiny flashlight. We waited in silence. Twenty minutes passed. Mari whispered that we were playing hide and go seek. She then broke into a loud laughter; but I did not recognize this laugh. Mari had never laughed this way. She giggled hysterically and her whole body shook as she tried to breathe; it horrified me. I saw my mother pinch her as she told my sister to quiet down.
After a while, I heard some of the other men hiding with us whisper among themselves. “Ya lo agarró la migra.” One of them began calling out “Frijol?! Frijol...?” I wanted to cry, but even in the darkness I felt my mother’s stern eyes looking at me, telling me to keep quiet. As I was ready to break into tears, a pair of cold hands held my mouth shut. The heavy, penetrating cigar smell of those cold male hands has stayed with me all these years.

I continued hearing the whispers, “¡Frijol?! ¿Frijol...?” Still hidden behind the bushes I could see flashlight beams pointing in our direction. A helicopter began circulating our area, its blades making a loud noise in the quiet closet we were in.

The flashlight beams got closer and closer, brighter and brighter. The man who had been calling out for Frijol said, “¡Ya nos cacharon!” I had never liked playing hide and go seek. I hated the feeling of being discovered; it made me anxious. It was not any different this time. They took him first, the man who had covered my mouth. A man wearing a green suit, whom I later found out was la migra, shoved him against the van that read “Border Patrol” and handcuffed him. I had never seen this done to anyone before. They shoved the man once again, but this time into the van. Slowly, the other men left the bushes with their hands up and walked towards the border patrol van. I heard my mother praying. I closed my eyes are realized they were now full of tears, and I began praying too. I prayed to go back home. I prayed that they wouldn’t take my mother. I did not want to play hide and go seek with these strangers.

When I opened my eyes I was shocked to see my mother slowly walking towards the border patrol van. One of the men wearing the green suits approached my sister and me. Mari squeezed my hand. I was not going to let go. I searched for Yeni’s hand. As my teary eyes met the man’s eyes, I fought against the tears and I tasted blood. My lips hurt. I had the awful tendency of biting my lips when I was nervous. He asked, “¿Es tu mamá?” I stared back at him. He raised his voice and asked again, “¿¡Es tu mamá?!” I looked at my mother and then back at the man. She nodded in approval for me to respond. I took a deep breath and responded, “Sì.” The man pointed to the van and said, “Súbanse.” That man’s voice and blue eyes have haunted me in my dreams since then.

Back then, I didn’t think that I was going to survive playing hide and go seek on the Otay Mesa border. Sixteen years later, I found myself packing my things to finish my last semester at UC Berkeley and as I recalled my odyssey, my mother now sitting in front of me. I asked my mother why she had forced me to memorize that number. My mother responded, “La decisión que tomé de traerme por el cerro tan chiquitas fue muy riesgosa. No logramos cruzar la primera vez, pero la segunda vez lo logramos. Gracias a Dios llegamos todas sanas y salvas. Pero si algo me pasaba, por lo menos le podían llamar a su tío.”

As I carefully opened my duffle bag to place the shoes I planned on using on the day I would be walking across the Berkeley stage to receive my diploma at my Public Health graduation ceremony, I turned around to hug my mother. I
thanked her for not leaving my sisters and I [me] behind in Mexico after my father had abandoned us and for letting us walk the journey to the U.S together in hopes of a better future with her.

I rarely cry now, but on this occasion I did get overwhelmed with joy and a sense of accomplishment, and I could not hold my tears back as I acknowledged I was about to realize my mother’s dreams at the end of this last semester at Berkeley. I credit my accomplishment to the character my mother fostered in me. My mother taught me to walk this journey with courage and persistence. Above all, my mother taught me that it doesn’t matter how scary the walk is, or how damaged the shoes get, once the first steps are taken, there is no turning back.
Figure 14. Julio Salgado, *My parents are courageous and responsible* (2011)
I Am a Turtle

Chantiri Ramirez

Undocumented immigrants carry on their back a deep sense of displacement.

One day you are here;  
the next day you are there.  
You are continuously running from place to place.  
Building homes, leaving homes.  
You miss what you once had;  
it’s hard to leave what you have now.

Your heart moves from reality to reminiscences,  
Your eyes from what you see to what you dream.  
The years go by and you wonder:  
“Will I ever go back?”

I moved.  
I was always moving.  
For years, my mom, my sister, and I rented a bedroom in people’s apartments.  
4 by 6, that was it.  
One bed.  
One desk.  
One dresser.  
We left our past home, because that house was a dangerous place,  
it had a man who didn’t know how to love.  
We came to el norte looking for a new one  
And we could only afford to make temporary little homes.

Metamorphosis, I became a turtle.
Since I was ten I’ve been carrying home.
I took it to the Westside, to Downtown, to the Coast.
And when the time to volar on my own came,
I took it to Berkeley, I took it to Oakland, it’s with me in Hayward.

My home is in my heart.

I never go back to an infrastructure, a building, a hood.
I have never gone back to the house where I learned how to walk,
to the apartment where I had my first kiss.

My home is in my heart, en las memorias,

Home is the touch of my mother’s hands, the cries of my baby sister, the face of my older sister. Home is the smell of sopes,
Home is on the pictures of my childhood friends,
The ones on the other side of a wall.
Of a thick wall that blocks the very possibility of hugging them again.

My home is in the memories
and the memories are on a little shell.
This is where I shield them,
this is where I make sure the meaning of my home is protected.
I carry this shell in my back; in the same place where I carry mis ganas de vivir.
I became a turtle because I wanted to have a home that could move with me,
como una casita mobil.

“I am a turtle, wherever I go I carry home in my back.”

[1] Gloria E. Anzaldúa
Gloria Anzaldúa

I was a little taken aback when I first read Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands* in the late 1980s. I was not certain about her style or her argument that the borderlands was an epistemology. This is what happens when a scholar changes the paradigm.

I had been so well conditioned to view history from a point of view that ignored Chicana/lesbiana voices that I did not know how to recognize their value. Thank you for expanding my world, Gloria.

Figure 15. Alberto Ledesma, *Gloria Anzaldúa* (2012)
Estoy contenta
Gabriela Monico

I’m happy. Me siento en un sillón en la terraza como todos los domingos a las 3 de la tarde en mis días de senectud, cuando no hay nadie en la casa. Tomo un poco de limonada y luego abro mi libretita, con mi lápiz empiezo a escribir. Mi nieta me mira con ojos de curiosidad y me pregunta, “¿Qué haces? ¿Qué escribes?”

Yo meneo mi cabeza y digo, “algún día vas a encontrar estas libretitas después que me entierren y verás lo que escribo.”

“Bueno pues un día las busco.”

Y ella un día las encontró y leyó todos mis secretos y mis penas hasta que sus lágrimas empaparon el papel.

Ella aprendió que mi esposo no era el mejor abuelo del mundo y que yo me encuentro en una celda, bajo estas cuatro paredes de casa. Y soy como una muñeca de sala, una más de sus bonitas de la colección de él, para mostrar al público.

Pero al fin y al cabo lo hacía por sacrificio a mis hijos. La sangre es oro. Para darles todo lo que la madre soltera no les pudo dar. Estoy contenta.
This is Frida Kahlo when she was a little girl. Already the spark of genius was obvious in her eyes. She could not know then the tragedy that would befall her just a few years later.

And yet, in spite of her pain, she persevered and became a world-renowned artist.

I see the same persistent look in so many of the undocumented students that I meet today, their own genius just waiting to flourish.

Figure 16. Alberto Ledesma, *Just waiting to flourish* (2013)
“...these dreams in my head”
“the invisible”¹

epysteme/xitima²

we really out here,
we dreamers adrift
cuz through these cali streets and city lights we weave and we shift.
we maneuver urban landscapes
moving like mist
as we navigate our ships through the sunset strip.

on the boulevards
we pushin’ hard
we keep it legit.
thus
i know you always see us though you want us to dip.
we be the invisible.
we wielding our fists
unconcealed,
raised high,
indeed we resist

from the migrant fresno farmers puttin’ work in the sticks
to the maids in the city and the youth activists;
try to stop our power?
yo, that’s funny, you wish,
cuz once we got ahold of it
we tighten our grip.
we taking claim for what was dispossessed from our kids.
no longer
will you snatch our food away from our dish.
you were splitting up our rivers then you robbing our fish?
then you ask why some of us be fuckin’ fed up and pissed!

through desperate situations we live and persist.
proclaiming our humanity:
we here, we exist.
articulating movements when we speak with our hips;
with passion running through us, it escapes from our lips.

and i do it for my ma dukes who gave me the gift
of compassion and of love,
it’s my spirit she lifts
my pops:
hustler for the fam’
stacking them chips.
envisioned flipping benzs now he’s pulling that whip.

i sit back,
i reflect and i trip
on all the past cracks
i coulda fell through and slipped.
traversing tattered tapestries that’s sewn up and stitched,
but here we stay blessed, marching forward, ya dig?

[1] this is lyrics to a rap; please read with rhythm. listen to the record here: https://soundcloud.com/epysteme-xitimo/the-uninvisible

[2] “epysteme” and “xitimo” are two of several rap pen names/identities of humberto ortiz
Figure 17. Alberto Ledesma, *Genesis of a dream* (2013)
Daydreamin’

Montzerrat García

I sit and wonder, daydreamin’
I ask questions with no answers
Think without direction
Remembering the hopes and dreams
Que me roban suspiros de orgullo
Aspirations that keep me grounded
When my head is in the clouds
Stirring up a storm of thoughts

Thoughts about life
a life of blind determination
que nunca ha visto fronteras
an invisible, transparent soul vive adentro
la cual se alimenta con amor
todos me ven pero nadie entiende
that a screaming voice is speaking out
but just because you have ears
does not mean you’ll listen.

I sit and wander, daydreamin’
Letting my blind hope guide me
While coloring my soul brown
And filling it with love, knowledge, and identity
that fuel my hunger for change.
So I dream as if I have never met failure,
Act as loud as I can,
And hope actions will do the talking for me.

Because these dreams in my head
Are too big for your imagination.
Figure 18. Alberto Ledesma, *UndociLisa* (2013)
“Let em know you’re there
That you struggling and surviving....”

Let Anastacio Rojas’s memory live, don’t make his case a mystery
Justice for our people, listen to his plea!
His plea for help, his cry for mercy, his need to live!
En paz descanse Anastacio Rojas, long live your memory.

Don’t label me, don’t label him....
skin color, accent, or lack thereof, are no markers for who I am, for who he is.
.....Anastacio Rojas no se olvida!

PEOPLE! RACE is not a human being you see!
It is merely a tool to dehumanize, to criminalize, to discriminate, to terrorize.....
An illegitimate, yet very capable, tool to oppress, to marginalize, to kill.

No! we are not Aliens
No! we are not foreigners
No! we are not lawbreaking parasites wishing
to displace the real Americans from their privileged status...
WE are human.

Somos humanos!
Solo queremos libertad, Justicia, y paz!
We seek to escape the injustices of a corrupt,
self-serving political system that has displaced all and any that
looks like me, like Anastacio.... Let me breathe! Let him live!
My skin color, my accent, my race should not label me criminal...

We are persistent! We are warriors fighting this vicious war against our existence
Yet we thrive, we are hungry to succeed!
Because the show goes on, even if they turn the lights out!
I’m not afraid anymore. 
Of new experiences, of being undocumented, of the unknown.

Growing up I was afraid,  
Afraid of dreaming high enough  
That my thin cushioned cloud  
could break any moment because  
Of the what if’s in life.  
What if I didn’t have enough money?  
What if it’s not even worth it in the end?  
What if I’m just wasting my time?  
But I’m not afraid anymore.  
I dream as high as I want,  
And if I do fall,  
I know how to get myself up.

Growing up I was afraid,  
Afraid of speaking with my heart open,  
Afraid of uncovering what it meant to be undocumented.  
But with a sense of lingering fear and need for dignity,  
I took risks and did everything  
I wasn’t supposed to do as an immigrant teenager.  
I worked hard in school without a guarantee to college,  
I’m an activist fighting for rights I don’t even have,  
And I already see myself graduating from medical school.  
But I’m not afraid anymore.  
Because this isn’t just about my unfulfilled dreams,  
It’s about being grateful to my family, community, and life.
Growing up I was afraid,
Afraid of leaving my emotional safety zone,
Afraid of the loneliness that could carve a hole in my soul.
But leaving the nest without knowing how to fly
Taught me that learning how to fly in midair
Is what it means to be undocumented.
Turning fear into determination,
Experiences into knowledge,
Anger into love,
Dreams into actions,
And actions into a tangible reality
Is what soaring DREAMERS do.
And I’m not afraid anymore,
Because my family, my future, my heart, and my soul
Deserve the opportunity to live out of fear.

With my head in the clouds like that of a fearless bird,
I don’t always know where I’m heading,
But I learn to live with the ambiguity of not knowing where
I am going to land as I fight against unexpected winds, rain,
And hail that try to break my powerful wings.
I embrace the element of surprise in my journey.
The inability and empowering sense
Of not knowing what’s going to happen after I graduate,
Of not knowing the certainty of my future,
Of not knowing the weight of my determination,
Because one way or another, with broken wings or not,
Everything that I DO know now,
No one can ever take away.

So I’m not afraid anymore,
Of new experiences, of being undocumented, of the unknown.
Figure 19. Julio Salgado, *No Sir I will not show you my papers*
I Am Always Out of Place

Linda Azucena Sánchez

I am indigenous, yet a scholar
Always a metiche metiendo la nariz donde no debo.

Growing up, I recall being humiliated for looking India
My psyche tormented by the negative notions of being indigenous
My self-esteem beaten to the ground by the nasty colonizer’s sentiment towards the
Zapotec blood running through my veins.

I am a walking memory reservoir; I am not supposed to be here! In me I carry the
history of the past. Through me, my indigenous ancestors live.

I am always out of place….in school I am not supposed to be smart
I am not supposed to know how to navigate both realms of my life as a Zapoteca and
scholar with such talent.

I am weighed down by the masculine gaze that oftentimes undermines my potential
and questions my presence in spaces I do not “belong.”

With me I carry these weights like a precious cargo to keep me rooted in my
hardship and water my roots that are sure to blossom into beautiful shades of
success and achievements.

I am mastering the colonizer’s language, studying his democracy, and surveying
his rhetoric.

With me I carry my dual identities. I am the colonizer’s nightmare.
Figure 20. Julio Salgado, *Undocumented, Unafraid and Unapologetic* (2011)
Love,

memory
Cafecito

Humberto Ortiz

I learned from watching my parents that adults discuss serious matters over café. I remember ‘Ama y Yolanda comadreando with coffee mugs in their hands, politicking about overpriced groceries and beefs with their employers. Un cafecito has always been Pops’ nightly ritual. I once hypothesized that it’s the sensation of warmth slowly traveling from his throat to his chest that soothes him after a long day of laboring. I now believe he winds down with café because it’s at the kitchen table where he unloads his burden: man of the house, provider. It’s the conversation, not the café – the café simply provides him the daily opportunity to be listened to.

After all, all men want is for their stories to be heard.

November 2008:

If I want to ask Lysa’s parents for their permission to date their daughter, I should do it over coffee - it’s the plática, not the café. Besides, it’s the right thing to do; it’s what a good man does. It’s what my father would do.

I’ll take them to dinner at Sizzler y pa’ un cafecito en Estárbacs. I can see us having conversations about our shared passion for Celia Cruz over mac ‘n’ cheese. I’ll then pop the question over caramel frappuccinos. This should hella impress them.

Although I probably could have dressed nicer, I put on my favorite navy blue hoodie to feel secure, to hide my insecurities. The harsh winter winds penetrate deep and ‘Ama always told me, “cúbrete bien, mi’jo.” Protect yourself.

Dinner wasn’t as important as getting them to coffeehouse – no por el café, pero por la plática. We finally arrive at the Starbucks on Main and First.

On nylon cushioned seats, Lysa’s parents position themselves across from me and I sit down on an uncomfortable wooden chair with Lysa on my right-hand side.

I think they see the anxiety outlining my eyes; estos ojos míos are too honest, even hidden behind mis lentes rayados. They must hear it in the way my voice cracks in a manner only a boy confronting manhood could produce – shaking with an overwhelming uncertainty.

Nevertheless, I proceed to explain why I care for their little girl, why I think I’d be good for her, and why I think she was good for me. Pretty damn mature for a kid that just turned the not-so-legal age of 18. And them being church-going
Christian folk, how could they say no?

I believe god blessed me with the ability to make people fall in love with me, so I know they liked me. I have goals and aspirations. I listen to her. I make her happy. I even make her feel secure enveloped in these skinny arms of mine. I know que su tía Elvia sees it in my eyes that I have nothing but an open heart to share. Te digo, estos ojos no mienten.

I somehow overcame the enormity of it all, and I finally uttered: “may I have your permission to go out with Lysa?”

To my unsuspecting innocence, her father offered:

“...How can you provide for her if you can’t really provide for yourself? You can’t get a job. You don’t have a driver’s license or a car. Don’t get me wrong – I’m glad you have aspirations, and you’re a smart kid. You’re very sweet, actually. But also you have to be realistic with your situation. She needs a man in her life at this point. We’re just not sure if you’re right for her given your situation. I’m sorry mi’ijo...”

I forgot exactly what was said the rest of that night. Pain has a funny way of fucking with your memory.

I remember I could only mutter quiet sobs, pushing mocha-scented breath from my tired lungs. I tried holding back tears; I was told that’s what strong men do. But staring at the floor to avoid eye contact, lágrimas dripped slowly. El sabor del café haunted my mouth – tasted like heartbreak: bitter and scorching hot.

“Ya ni tengo el permiso de amar,” I felt. Pinches papeles...

I walked home with puffy eyes and half-truth explanations prepared for my parents. Half-truths – I suppose I was trying to protect my parents from the full truth: Lysa’s parents didn’t want me to be with her because I don’t have papers. ‘Ama noticed her son had just finished crying, y me pregunta con esa preocupación típica de la madres, “Mi’ijo, ¿qué paso?” I told them that Lysa’s parents didn’t want me to be with her but I didn’t say exactly why. Pops responded, “Pero Beto, no llores; no es para tanto, hijo”.

Yea, Pops, it was.
Figure 21. Alberto Ledesma, *The Unbearable Weight of Being an Undocumented Lover* (2012)
Maybe it was my penchant for the melodramatic that first got me interested in Leo Boccaglio’s words when I was in high school. It had been one of the most difficult periods of my family’s undocumented American journey. Papá had been unemployed for several months and I had just broken up with yet another girlfriend who seemed to think I was not a good prospect. Then I found Boccaglio’s lecture on PBS. He spoke about how all human problems could be solved with a heavy dose of love. I remember reading his entire book in one sitting. But, no matter how much I tried, I was still depressed.

Figure 22. Alberto Ledesma, ‘I guess unconditional love was antithetical to my immigrant fatalism’ (2013)
Out of a necessity to survive

Chantiri Ramirez

Los golpes duelen
pero duelen más las palabras
y cuando las palabras vienen de la boca del hombre que amas,
los golpes y las palabras
son cuchillos que se entierran
en lo mas hondo
del corazón.

Es así como las palabras cicatrizan el cuerpo
y cuando al espejo te ves
y encuentras esas marquitas,
rojas, delgadas
tu sabes,
las palabras
siguen todavía
ahí.

That’s why I decided to write—out of a necessity to heal the wounds those words left on me.

Puta, Pendeja—it will take seven generations to get those words out of my body.
Seven generations.
Out of my child’s body
Out of my grandchild’s body...
But they will get those words out of their bodies
Y los recuerdos duelen
Pero duelen más los rencores
Y cuando los rencores vienen de las raíces más gruesas del alma
Los recuerdos y los rencores
Son martirios que se llevan
En lo más hondo
De la tumba

Y como a la tumba na’mas me llevaré los huesos y el cuero
No hay espacio
Yo no quepo
Para esos recuerdos y rencores

That’s why I decided to move---out of a necessity to survive.
Y así empezar
A seguir
En otra tierra
Lo juro
Figure 23. Julio Salgado, *Who are you calling low skilled?* (2013)
5:25 A.M.

Marco Antonio Flores

para el primer hombre
que aprendí amar, C.V.M.

Quizás son los rayos del Sol
que me despiertan al amanecer.

Quizás son mis suspiros al pensar en ti.
Quizás son las caricias de tu fantasma,
suspiros que me mantienen en silencio.

Y al tocar la cicatriz de mi memoria
suspiro al sabor de tus labios.
Tu piel afinada,
un río de recuerdos.

Quizás es porque mi piel aún te busca,
haz dejado rastro de tu calor -
mi cama
tu piel.

Quizás fue el calor de tu piel,
las gotas de sudor
que al caer de tu espalda
mis dedos corrían
lentamente entre
tus labios.

Quizás es el olor de tu respirar,
the smooth skin
that runs along your back.

Quizás es el olor de tu piel morena,
olor a tierra mojada.
The two perfectly dotted
birthmarks on your back.

Quizás fueron tus uñas
arañándome la espalda,
Tus dedos
que lentamente corrían
entre las olas de mi pelo.

Quizás fueron tus labios
besos que lentamente
acariciaban mi pecho.
Las montañas en las
que descansabas tus
cuentos al caer la noche.

Quizás fue tu barba
que lentamente raspaba
con cada caricia.

Pero es el olor de mi almohada
las sabanas blancas
el olor de tu piel
que me mantiene despierto.

Your name engraved on my lips
la ternura de tus brazos al dormir.
Tus caricias
imbedded deep within
my brown skin.

Son los recuerdos al salir el Sol
memories that seethe under my skin.
Mi cama,
aún tibia de tu piel.

Quizás fueron mis besos en tu espalda.
Mi piel,
aún te busca
Figure 24. Julio Salgado, *Queer Butterfly* (2013)
Driving along the coast on the 101 Highway, I keep my eyes wide open. We pass lush green fields along the way. I want to run my fingers along the curls of green vines. An orange sun, our gente hunched over, picking grapes.

I was twelve. We were driving hacia el norte, headed to visit family in the Bay.

José José plays, papá remains inattentive. Humming, he remains unaware of his son.

*Que triste luce todo sin ti,*
*los mares de las playas se van*
*se tiñen los colores de gris,*
*hoy todo es soledad*

His eyes are focused on the road; he remains absorbed by the ballad. He knows every line. Holding onto the steering wheel, he sings:

*No se, si vuelva a verte después,*
*no se, que de mi vida será*
*sin el lucero azul de tu ser,*
*que no me alumbra ya…*

Muffled by static, he lowers the volume.

Nightfall was marked by silence, though I’d sit fidgeting trying to get his attention. “Quédate quieto.” Papá always wanted company, but never asked for conversation. Our long rides on the road were filled by songs playing on the radio. He seemed to be lost in his head most of the time, even in my presence.

I stare at his reflection in the windshield. A perfectly groomed gray mustache and a buzz cut, thick eyelashes casting shadows on chato cheeks. His honey-colored eyes are on the road. One could not tell his age in the moonlight.

I catch glimpses of his dark-skinned profile. My father is forty-two and his face carries the weight from twelve years of working under many sweltering suns.

I gaze at the night sky from my window. Often blinded by city lights and Disneyland fireworks, I’ve never seen such simple beauty. The stars shine like pearls in a dark ocean, reminding me of mamá’s cuentos, La Llorona searching for her children under a full moon.

“¿Cuántas estrellas crees que hay?” I ask papá, hoping to get him to talk. I’d look up at the stars, peek my finger out the window. I wanted to touch them.
“Mmm, muchas. Imaginate, ni para poder contarlas.” His eyes stayed on the road.

Papá always knew details that surprised me. He never went beyond grammar school. Since his arrival to the United States in 1994, he spent most of his life as a construction worker.

Uno, dos, tres, cuatro, cinco... ninety-eight, ninety-nine, one hundred. “Hay muchas, no creo que las pueda contar todas.” He’d smile and laugh.

He leaned forward, searching for a new station to play.

Looking past him, I stare out into the ocean. The muffled mingles with the sounds of the roaring sea.

“Mira que bonito se ve el mar debajo de la luna llena ’apa,” I say, cracking open my window. The glimmer of the moonlight reflected off the clashing waves.

*I wanted papá to listen too. I wanted him to watch with me.*

“Sí, ya duermete. Yo te despierto al llegar a la casa de tus primas.” He didn’t look. Turning the knob on the radio, he went searching for another station.

Closing my eyes, I focus on the sounds of crashing waves, the cool breeze, and papá’s cheap cologne. I am enjoying papá’s company. We are together, the night sky illuminating a path for us on the long road. Always on the road.

Papá finds another José José song.

*Por eso regreso borracho de angustia*
*te lleno de besos y caricias mustias*
*pero estás dormida no sientes caricias*
*te abrazo a mi pecho me duermo contigo*
*mas luego despierto tú no estas conmigo*
*solo está mi almohada*

When I open my eyes again, my head is resting on papá’s chest. I can hear the beat of his heart. This is the first time. His arms around me, he covers me.

***

Silence. Nothing but falling leaves outside the bedroom window.

I think of papá. I think back to what he once told me when I was a child. “Un hombre no puede amar a otro hombre,” the stinging of his hand across my face.

I turn to Cris to remind myself I am here, with him. He is half asleep. I listen to his soft breathing.

His fingers run through my thick curls. I take a deep breath. I run my fingers along his chest, I have never touched such beauty. Brown, piel canela. Olor de tierra mojada. Sweet. I trace a river pumping from his heartbeat to his belly.

“Did your father ever teach you to love another man?” I ask.
His body stiffens, his breathing short, the room silent.

He mumbles, “I never met my father.”

Minutes later, he falls asleep. Watching him, I run my fingers along his shoulders. Hovering, I kiss his forehead.

Closing my eyes, I listen closely to the wind blowing outside his window. I am not certain if I am dreaming or if I am awake.

I catch my reflection, the image of a man in my arms.

*I am naked.*

*In bed.*

*Holding another man.*
Figure 25. Julio Salgado, *Out of your hands and into your mind* (2014).
The stories in this anthology would leave any American—even a UC Berkeley student—filled with wonder. The average college student, and especially those who grow up poor, contends with the demands of courses, research, work, and family. Undocumented students deal with all of the above, plus a daily dose of racism, prejudice, the threat of deportation, poverty, and dehumanization. Fighting such overwhelming odds, undocumented students often have, quite literally, only themselves to rely on.

As I read through the stories in this anthology, I found myself marveling over each student’s determination to obtain a college degree. Every student was driven by immense heart. The stories they told were also laced with hardship. As Gabriela Monico so eloquently states, “I have learned to live with the pain of a nation that doesn’t want me;” even, as Humberto Ortiz experienced, “by our own people.” Other students cope by becoming, as Linda Azucena Sánchez writes, “icons of excellence,” often at great personal cost. Still other students move from home to home, so that the only home left (besides the one in one’s heart) is, as Chantiri Ramirez speaks, “the touch of (a) mother’s hands.” Few Americans have to fight so hard to simply live.

The subtext of fear underscores many of the stories told by these students. Every day, they deal with the grim reality that they, or members of their family could be deported. At the very least they face constant prejudice and discrimination. I’m certain that unless you’ve known fear, you don’t know fear. How does one cope with the constant threat of being uprooted from everything one has worked so hard to gain? How many truths must one hide to evade suspicion?

I recall the fear I had of people finding out I was queer. Fearing the loss of my family and the denigration by society, I kept this part of myself hidden. The mental toll hiding took challenged the very essence of my existence. It wasn’t until I came out did I discover freedom—my heart suddenly open to love, and to becoming the real me. I’ll never forget the happiness I felt in not having to hide anymore. When I started working on the Berkeley campus in 1986, Cherríe Moraga and I recognized the need to support queer Berkeley undergraduates and co-founded La Familia, a support group for queer/questioning Chicano/Latino students. These undergraduates—some of whom literally quivered in fear—thrived in this group and bonded together by similar challenges. Though I do realize that coming out to one’s family and friends remains challenging today, the similarities of the queer students back then and the undocumented students...
today does not escape me. I can only imagine how difficult it must be to be both queer and undocumented, as these students must always come out twice

Despite everything, the pieces written by these students ring with hope. Written with a collective spirit to fight society’s silencing, these students have all stepped forward to tell us their stories. They’ve overcome the odds, having slept on couches, worked under the table, asked for donations, borrowed from friends, sought out allies, left their families, and worked, and worked, and worked, and worked—all with the goal of obtaining a college degree. They sacrificed and starved, not only for themselves and their families, but ultimately for this country. Where else do you know anyone who has worked so hard to achieve? They should all be given a damn medal.

I hope these stories change the hearts of the uninformed, and expand the minds of those who are informed. Even more, I hope these stories inspire other students to come forward to fight away the silence so that everyone can feel, as Ju Hong states, that “they are normal, again.

Carla Trujillo, PhD
Director, Graduate Diversity Program
From 2010–2012, UC Berkeley research and community partners led a multi-pronged research project studying the campus climate for undocumented students at Cal. After years of noting the difficulties many undocumented students faced at Cal— including financial and legal barriers to education, health challenges, experiences of isolation and fear, and racism—project leaders wanted to conduct research to formally document these issues, examine their roots, and identify strong recommendations that would create a more just and supportive campus for undocumented members of the Cal community.

The project was envisioned and designed by students, faculty, and staff from the Center for Race & Gender, the Center for Latino Policy Research, the Multicultural Community Center, Chicano/Latino Student Development, Asian Pacific American Student Development, Rising Immigrant Scholars through Education (RISE), and Asian Students Promoting Immigrant Rights through Education (ASPIRE), and the project received funding from a Haas Innovation Grant. Partners identified the following goals for the project:

- Initiate intentional community building efforts among undocumented students across lines of race, ethnicity and national origin through a creative writing practice.

- Launch an investigative research project that collects critical data about the experiences and insights of undocumented students at UC Berkeley.

- Facilitate the distribution of findings from our community building and research projects as to works towards improving the campus climate for this student population.
In addition to qualitative interviews and community building and outreach efforts, the project followed a recommendation from student organization, RISE, to design and facilitate a writing workshop for undocumented students on campus. RISE student leaders noted that a space for self-reflection and creative production could support undocumented students to deeply explore their own experiences, illuminate information about the campus climate that would not necessarily be revealed in a more formal interview, and transform the process from an experience of being “researched” into a collective art practice. Many of the writings that were developed in the workshop are included in this anthology.

Research Findings:

• Although representing a large percentage of undocumented students, Asian/Pacific Islander undocumented students are less involved in organizing around this issue at Cal and therefore are often less aware of the resources available to support undocumented students on campus.

• Family dislocation and separation due to stringent immigration laws is a significant factor in undocumented students’ lives.

• Many undocumented students first go to community college before they ultimately matriculate to Cal, making community colleges an important point in the K-12 to college pipeline.

• Many campus entities had been working to provide support and resources to undocumented students, but there was no systematic cataloging of those resources and spaces. We attempt to provide that catalogue here.

• Staff and faculty have been both unsupportive and very supportive of undocumented students, making it hard to know who students can trust on campus.

• Despite the passage of A.B. 130 and A.B. 131, the financial situation for undocumented students remains a challenge, and needs to continue to be addressed by Cal’s financial aid office and other entities in a position to provide material support to these students.

• The creation of a staff position to support undocumented students has greatly improved these students’ ability to access information in a centralized location. However, many students remain unaware of this resource.

• Mental health resources need to be developed for this population of students. Student activism has been one critical outlet for students to support their own well-being as well as for creating social change.

• The writing workshop provided students with a safe space and creative practice they found to be supportive and useful both personally and academically.
Campus Recommendations:

- UC Berkeley should continue to lead on this issue, maintaining support for Meng So’s staff position at the newly opened Dreamers’ Resource Center. Support this program as well as other staff and offices on campus that have been supporting undocumented students, such as Student Development Offices and the Multicultural Community Center, to continue to provide ongoing training for different campus units about undocumented student issues.

- The university should make a proactive effort to ensure that all undocumented students have information about and access to the support services available on campus, including Asian/Pacific Islander students, students of African descent, and other immigrant students who tend to be underrepresented in discussions about undocumented students.

- To decrease isolation, the university should support a peer mentorship program to help students develop and nurture community on campus, and help navigate campus systems.

- The university should actively assist students with their legal options.

- We need more targeted outreach and support services for potential undocumented transfer students. Campus staff should work collaboratively with counselors and faculty at the community colleges.

- Alternative pedagogical spaces, like creative writing workshops and the Teatro Lab at the Department of Theater, Dance, & Performance Studies, should be supported to provide undocumented students with outlets where they can work through their challenges while also developing their academic skill sets.

- The Tang Center & Counseling and Psychological Services need further trainings and should actively work to recruit and hire additional staff with expertise in assisting immigrant students, students of color, working-class students and other campus populations with similar backgrounds.

- The Career Center should develop services targeted towards the unique situation undocumented students face in the job market.

- A mandatory training for campus faculty and staff will help create more consistent support for students across campus.

- A resource guide tailored specifically to undocumented students on the UC Berkeley campus should be done in hard copy and disseminated to all students, faculty, staff and administrators at Berkeley would be significantly helpful.

- The university should actively support current and pending immigrant justice legislation, particularly the federal DREAM Act.
• The Chancellor and UCPD work with the Berkeley Police Department must make the UC Berkeley campus and surrounding areas, a sanctuary campus. The university must uphold their responsibility of ensuring that campus is a safe place for ALL students including undocumented students and will not allow federal agencies, such as ICE, to come onto campus. A policy or MOU regarding dealing with undocumented students and their safety involvement at protests would be a good first step towards this end.

Read the full research report:
http://crg.berkeley.edu/content/research-report-undocumented-students
Biographies of Contributors

Writers

Miriam Avilez was born in Queretaro, Mexico and immigrated to the United States at age five. She graduated from UC Berkeley in 2010 with a Bachelor’s of Arts in Public Health. While at Berkeley, Miriam did work revolving around health advocacy, helping coordinate health fairs and workshops for low-income communities. Currently, she is preparing to apply for a Master’s in Public Health program.

Marco Antonio Flores was born in Manzanillo, Colima, Mexico. He was raised by his tías and abuelas until he immigrated to the United States in 1994. Currently a graduate student in Ethnic Studies at the University of California, Berkeley, his interests include Chicana/o experimental film, visual culture, and queer aesthetics. He is a member of the undocumented queer movement, pursuing activism through art practice as a medium for community transformation. However, he’s often drawn to the magic that nightfall brings, matters of the heart, and the poetic musings of life.

Andrea Guerrero Garcia was born in Salvatierra, Guanajuato, Mexico. She received her B.A. in Linguistics from UC Berkeley in 2010 and has since continued to love all things related to language. Currently, she is a graduate student in the department of Linguistics at the University of California, San Diego. She is particularly invested in linguistic rights, language change and variation among immigrant communities, and Zapotec languages. She also enjoys chisme and coffee sessions, 90’s R&B, and eating too many gansitos marinela.

Montzerrat García was born in Guerrero, Mexico, and immigrated to Santa Ana, California at age 8. She is graduating this year from UC Berkeley and is majoring in Integrative Biology and Ethnic Studies. She plans on becoming a primary care physician with hopes of helping make healthcare more accessible to underrepresented communities, such as the undocumented community. Montzerrat is the oldest out of three sisters and is the first to go to a university. She values her family above all and is proud of her roots. She says she appreciates the lessons learned, and the small things in life that make her smile as much as the dreams that are hidden deep inside her heart.

Ju Hong emigrated from South Korea to the United States when he was 11 years old. Ju attended Laney College in Oakland, where he was elected as the first Asian American and the youngest student body president. He graduated from Laney College with a 3.8 GPA and transferred to the University of California, Berkeley. At Berkeley, he ran for student government senator and was elected as the very first undocumented student government senator in UC Berkeley history. In fall
2012, Ju graduated from UC Berkeley with a degree in Political Science. Currently, he is pursuing Master’s degree in public administration at San Francisco State University. After he finishes the program, he hopes to continue to work at nonprofit organization to advocate for the right of immigrant community.

Alejandro Jimenez was born in Mexico D.F and as a young boy he fell in love with the Los Angeles Dodgers while in LA. On any given day you can find Alejandro being a hip-hop nerd. He researches the ESL to dishwasher pipeline while in college, but enjoys learning on his own while in the world. He finds himself doing undercover ethnographies almost anywhere he goes and is an aspiring professor, a thinker with a demeanor of a dreamer.

Gabriela Monico was born and raised in El Salvador. At the age of 16, she immigrated to the United States. Her experiences have shaped her into who she is today and have allowed her to learn from the struggles of different communities at home and abroad. In the near future, she hopes to continue her education with the goal of further engaging in labor and migrant justice work. In her spare time, Gabriela enjoys reading, watching films, and swimming.

Humberto Ortiz was born chilango, raised chicano: born in La Ciudad de México, Distrito Federal and grew up in Echo Park, Los Ángeles. Humberto is an amateur musicologist; he loves and studies all kinds of musics – anything ranging from salsa, to death metal, to afrobeat, to classical baroque music and all things in between – though he holds a special place in his heart for hip-hop music, history, and culture. He raps and makes beats, and often shares freestyle cypher sessions with Alejandro at the world (in)famous Roach. Humberto also enjoys intimate conversations about love and family.

Chantiri Ramirez was born in Queretaro, Mexico; raised in California. She has had many places to call home, but considers Los Angeles her home (for now). Chantiri holds a B.A. from U.C. Berkeley in Development Studies. She is a doctoral student in the Cesar E. Chavez Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies at UCLA where she is receiving support to continue critical knowledge production on the lived experiences of undocumented immigrant communities. She has always been an undercover poet with an infatuation for calavera art. She uses running as a way to transcend, escape, and believe in herself.

Linda Azucena Sánchez is a native Zapotec from the valleys of Oaxaca, Mexico who immigrated to the United States during her early teens speaking only her native tongue. Pursuing a double major in Political Science and Chicano Studies, she is the first female in her village to attend a university and only amongst a few handful to pursue higher education. Her research with indigenous youth and language degradation motivated her to write a soon to be published children’s book narrated in Zapotec and Spanish. Linda has big plans for the future, stay tuned.
Artists

Alberto Ledesma holds a doctoral degree in Ethnic Studies from UC Berkeley. He is a past winner of U.C. Irvine’s Chicano/Latino Literary Prize for Poetry and his works have appeared in the Berkeley Poetry Review, Con/Safos, Gary Soto’s Chicano Chapbook Series, Colorlines, and New American Media. He currently works as a writing program coordinator at U.C. Berkeley’s Student Learning Center and can often be found at one of the local restaurants working on his latest short story or cartoon.

Julio Salgado is the co-founder of DreamersAdrift.com. His activist artwork has become a staple of the DREAM Act movement. His status as an undocumented, queer artist has fueled the contents of his illustrations, which depict key individuals and moments of the DREAM Act movement. Undocumented students and allies across the country have used Salgado’s artwork to call attention to the youth-led movement.

His work has been praised by OC Weekly’s Gustavo Arellano, KPCC-FM 89.3’s Multi-American blog and the influential journal ColorLines. In July 2012, Salgado and other undocumented activists joined Jose A. Vargas on the cover of Time magazine. Salgado graduated from California State University, Long Beach with a degree in journalism. To see more of his artwork and other collaborations, you can go to juliosalgado.com.

Contributing Writer

Carla Trujillo’s novel, What Night Brings (Curbstone Press, 2003), received the Miguel Mármol Prize for best first work of fiction by a Latino/a writer, the Latino Book Award for fiction, and the Paterson Fiction Prize. It was a finalist for the LAMBDA Literary Award, ForeWord Magazine’s Book of the Year, and was an honorable mention for the Gustavus Myers Book Award. What Night Brings was one of three finalists for the University of Washington’s “common book” for 2009 (read by all incoming first year students). Carla is also the editor of Living Chicana Theory (1998) and Lammy Award winning Chicana Lesbians: The Girls Our Mothers Warned Us About (1991). Carla has also written various articles on identity and higher education. Her latest novel, Faith and Fat Chances, was a finalist for the 2012 PEN Bellwether Prize. Carla works at UC Berkeley as the Director of the Graduate Diversity Program, and has taught fiction writing at the Lambda Literary Foundation’s Emerging Writers Retreat and the Macondo Writing Workshop.

Editorial Board

Gonzalo Arrizón is a Study Strategies Coordinator with The Student Learning Center at UC Berkeley. With an undergraduate degree from UC Berkeley and a Master’s from UC Santa Barbara in English, Gonzalo has 15 years of experience assisting undergraduates with Study Strategies through key academic transitions.
This includes teaching small seminars, facilitating workshops, and consulting with individual students. He also trains a group of undergraduate Peer Mentors that assist students in reaching their academic and personal goals. Gonzalo also teaches a writing course annually through the Chicano/a Studies department, sponsored by the Summer Bridge program.

**Cruz Grimaldo** is a regarded poet and performer who graduated from UC Berkeley with a degree in English and an emphasis on Poetry. During her time in the English Department, she had the privilege of working with Alfred Arteaga, Robert Hass, Stephen Booth, Charles Altieri and performed under the direction of Hugh Richmond and Louis Fantasia. She has performed at the Hip Hop Theater Festival, UC Berkeley, La Peña Cultural Center, Saint Mary’s College, Los Medanos College, Teatro Vision, YBCA, Galeria de la Raza, Brava Theater, USF, University of Illinois, Self Help Graphics, and CASA 0101. Cruz is passionate about keeping Cal accessible and affordable for all students and she facilitates an annual course in Chicana Studies at UC Berkeley for new students.

**Elisa Diana Huerta** is a Brawley born and Tejas raised organizer, activist, artesana and scholar. After receiving bachelor’s degrees in Mexican American Studies, Cultural Anthropology, and Plan II from the University of Texas at Austin, Elisa moved to Santa Cruz, CA in order to pursue a Ph.D. in Cultural Anthropology with parenthetical notations in Latin American & Latino Studies and Feminist Studies. She spends a lot of time thinking and writing about expressive culture, performance, women of color praxis, and indigeneity. As the Director of the Multicultural Community Center at the University of California, Berkeley, Elisa works to create dynamic and engaged spaces where students, faculty, staff, and community members can learn, heal, create and vision.

**Alberto Ledesma**  
see artist bios

**Kevin Escudero** is the son of a Vietnamese refugee mother and Bolivian immigrant father raised in Ventura County, CA where issues of migration and citizenship were central to his family’s experience. He received his Ph.D. in Ethnic Studies from UC Berkeley with a dissertation, “Mobilizing Rights, Contesting Citizenship and Leveraging Intersectional Identities: Immigrant Youth Activism in Chicago and the San Francisco Bay Area” examining the activism of undocumented youth, in particular instances of cross-racial coalition building and the use of law as a tool for social movement organizing. Kevin is currently a Gaius Charles Bolin Fellow in Latina/o Studies at Williams College and student at Yale Law School.

**Advisors**

**Alisa Bierria** is the Associate Director of the Center for Race and Gender at UC Berkeley and a PhD candidate in the Department of Philosophy at Stanford University. Her dissertation explores the role of social and political recognition in human agency. She is the recipient of the Diane J. Middlebrook Prize for Graduate Teaching and has years of experience writing, teaching, and organizing on issues
of violence and redress. Other research interests include black existentialism, feminist of color theory, speculative theory of the body, and popular culture. She is co-editor of *Community Accountability: Emerging Movements to Transform Violence*, a special issue of *Social Justice: A Journal of Crime, Conflict, and World Order*.

**Lisa García-Bedolla** is Professor of Social and Cultural Studies in the Graduate School of Education at the University of California, Berkeley and Chair of Berkeley’s Center for Latino Policy Research. She is author of numerous award-winning books, including *Mobilizing Inclusion: Transforming the Electorate through Get-Out-the-Vote Campaigns* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), winner of the American Political Science Association’s (APSA) Ralph Bunche Award and a best book award from APSA’s Race, Ethnicity, and Politics Section. Professor García Bedolla’s research focuses on how marginalization and inequality structure the political and educational opportunities available to members of ethnoracial groups, with a particular emphasis on the intersections of race, class, and gender. She received her Ph.D. in Political Science from Yale University and her B.A. in Latin American Studies and Comparative Literature from the University of California, Berkeley.

**Evelyn Nakano Glenn** is Professor of Gender and Women’s Studies and Ethnic Studies at the University of California, Berkeley, where she is also the Founding Director of the Center for Race and Gender. Her teaching and research interests focus on the dynamics of race, gender, and class in processes of inequality and exclusion. She is the author of *Issei, Nisei, War Bride: Three Generations of Japanese American Women in Domestic Service* (Temple University Press); *Unequal Freedom: How Race and Gender Shaped American Citizenship and Labor* (Harvard University Press); and *Forced to Care: Coercion and Caregiving in America* (Harvard University Press). She co-edited/edited the volumes *Mothering: Ideology, Experience and Agency* (Routledge), and *Shades of Difference: Why Skin Color Matters* (Stanford University Press). Her articles have appeared in numerous journals and edited volumes, some in French and Italian translations. Professor Glenn is a past-president of the American Sociological Association.
Figure 26. Julio Salgado, *It takes a muscle to fall in love…* (2013)
advance praise for

*It Was All a Dream*

“Drenched in a level of honesty that reveals suffering amidst beauty, the narratives in this book bring us closer to the humanity that we lose in everyday discourse about immigration. Navigating between pride and humility, fear and victory, the stories will captivate readers and invigorate those who work to achieve the human rights of all immigrants. This is a must-read for anyone who has ever crossed borders, faced obstacles, or aspired to more than what society provides.”

-Leisy J. Abrego, UCLA Assistant Professor of Chicana/o Studies

“In this innovative book, the first of its kind, students who have been forced to live in a state of undocumentation in the U.S. give voice, brilliantly, from the heart, to many of the difficulties, traumas, uprootedness, violence, fears, poverty and sacrifices that their condition entails, as well as to the gifts of determination, love and solidarity that provide sustenance. With tremendous courage they break the silence on undocumentation through many genres: personal narratives, poetry, poster art, painting, an official report.... To enter the world of this book’s authors through their words and art is to open oneself to the beautiful and rare offerings of intimate and political transformation that they so generously impart.”

-Paola Bacchetta, University of California, Berkeley

“It Was All A Dream describes everything we need to know about our reality right now. These young writers and artists often describe a nation that casually and brutally acts directly against its highest ideals. Still, they push headlong past precarity, fear, and invisibility. They find vision and voice to tell their stories. They dream heroic dreams. These powerful works call us to see the new world they see and to join them in raising our voices for justice.”

-Jeff Chang, author of *Who We Be: The Colorization Of America*

These testimonies remind us of the selflessness and courage that prompt real people to brave the flesh and blood trek out of extreme economic crises or the dangers of war. We come to understand, in reading these heartfelt words, that the hard work, sacrifices, and love for each other that is honored in the telling by these contributors, are a profoundly human and universal story. It is the story of exodus, exile, and the hope-filled remaking of lives that enriches the lives of those around them. The contributors to this volume journey across stereotype, misunderstanding, and fear, helping pave a way forward that connects us all in a more deeply human, compassionate, and just way.

-Laura E. Pérez, author of *Chicana Art: The Politics of Spiritual and Aesthetic Altarities* (Duke University Press 2007) and associate professor in the Department of Ethnic Studies, University of California, Berkeley
“it was all A DREAM

...is a poignant and striking collage of words and images, capturing the nuanced experiences of undocumented life in the United States in its many complexities. From the intimately personal space of their own life experiences the contributors to this brilliant collection craft a new narrative in a way that only they can.”

-Roberto G. Gonzales, Harvard University