

**Undocumented and Acting Up:
Queer Sovereignty in the Immigrant Rights Movement**

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Introduction

In her book *Antigone, Interrupted*, political theorist Bonnie Honig notes a tendency among certain political theorists to display “fascination with rupture over the everyday, powerlessness over sovereignty, and heroic martyrdom over the seemingly dull work of maintenance, repair, and planning for possible futures.”¹ Rather than defining political freedom solely in terms of “nonsovereignty, unpredictability, risk, and uncertainty,”² Honig asks whether democratic and feminist theorists “might rethink the rejection of sovereignty and consider devoting themselves instead to its cultivation. We might be critical of sovereignty’s operations in particular contexts while still seeking to enlist the powers of sovereignty in others, for our own democratic or redistributive agendas.”³ Using AIDS activism as a model, Honig argues that groups such as ACT UP, facing a crisis of mass death and government neglect, sought “not just to oppose the state and expose the irresponsibility of government but to enlist the state’s resources.” AIDS activists “wanted sovereignty, and they tried to claim it. They did not want to just to lament sovereignty’s excesses.”⁴

In this paper, I extend Honig’s call for an “agonistic enlistment of the state” by revisiting the work of ACT UP to reconsider what it means to “queer” the politics of immigration.⁵ While ACT UP was only one of many organizations crucial to AIDS activism, as Ann Cvetkovich has written, ACT UP was particularly noteworthy for creating “new forms of cultural and media activism” and incorporating “a distinctive flair for the visual and performative.”⁶ In this essay, I want to consider the resonances between AIDS activism and undocumented activism. More specifically, theorizing such affinities exposes how both “homosexuals” and “illegals” are vilified in ways that are deeply dehumanizing. As Karma Chávez notes, both LGBT and migrant politics have been “attacked

¹ Honig, *Antigone*, p. 2.

² For examples of this tendency Honig identifies, see Ferguson, 162.

³ Honig, *Antigone*, p. 2.

⁴ Honig, *Antigone*, pp. 59-60.

⁵ Honig, *Antigone*, p. 61

⁶ Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Traumas, Sexualities, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Duke University Press, 2003), 157. As Cvetkovich notes, “Organizations like GMHC, People with AIDS Coalition (PWAC) – which began four years before ACT UP began: “Too often people mark the beginning of AIDS activism with the founding of ACT UP. But by then, generations of PWA’s had died fighting for their lives,” Cvetkovich, 181.

through shared logics of scapegoating, threat, and deviance.”⁷ Writing in 1989, Douglas Crimp speaks of how those suffering from HIV/AIDS are “blamed, belittled, excluded, derided. We are discriminated against, lose our housing and jobs, denied medical and life insurance. Every public agency whose job it is to combat the epidemic has been slow to act, failed entirely, or been deliberately counterproductive.”⁸

Crimp’s analysis echoes today’s detention and deportation crisis, in which the undocumented are also “blamed, belittled, excluded, derided.” Discriminated against and denied access to health insurance, these distinct yet overlapping communities both struggle against a mass culture that conflates their identities with a particular stigmatized crisis. As AIDS activists continually stressed, “AIDS does not discriminate” — the disease can affect (and infect) anyone. Indeed, the majority of people with HIV/AIDS are poor and people of color.⁹ Yet from the time it came to the public’s attention, HIV/AIDS became associated with the gay community, particularly gay men.

In a similar vein, anyone can be (or become) undocumented — large numbers of undocumented individuals in the United States are from China, Ireland, Russia, and the Philippines. Yet it is Latinos who are most closely associated with illegality, particularly Mexicans.¹⁰ In this way, both groups confront a politics of mass hysteria characterized by physical targeting and removal — both experience the deaths and violent acts aimed at their communities through a stigmatized logic of blame that characterizes the populations in question as “bringing it on themselves.”¹¹ Describing the assaultive dynamics circulating during the AIDS crisis, Crimp notes that “[s]eldom has a society so savaged a people during their hour of loss.”¹² Faced with a dehumanizing logic that holds them responsible for their own suffering, people with AIDS/HIV (PWAs) and the undocumented (people living without papers) each challenge a political culture more interested in simplistic accounts of individual action than in complex analyses of neoliberalism, human desire, and government failure.

⁷ Karma Chávez, *Queer Migration Politics: Activist Rhetoric and Coalitional Possibilities* (University of Illinois Press, 2013), 10.

⁸ “Mourning and Militancy,” 146.

⁹ As Douglas Crimp notes that “What is now called AIDS was first seen in middle-class gay men in America, in part because of our access to medical care. Retrospectively, however, it appears that IV drug users—whether gay or straight—were dying of AIDS in New York throughout the ‘70s and early ‘80s, but a class-based and racist bias failed to begin to look until 1987.” See “How to Have Promiscuity in an Epidemic” in *Melancholia and Moralism: Essays on AIDS and Queer Politics* (MIT Press, 2002, p. 59.

¹⁰ As Alicia Schmidt Camacho notes, “[b]ecause Latino communities have historically been composed of higher percentages of undocumented migrants and non-naturalized legal residents, they have been particularly vulnerable to deportation and exulsion.” See “Hailing the Twelve Million: U.S. Immigration Policy, Deportation, and the Imaginary of Lawful Violence,” by Alicia Schmidt Camacho, *Social Text*, Vol. 28, No. 4 (Winter 2010), 17.

¹¹ Insert footnote re: the fact that these are overlapping communities (obviously)

¹² See “Mourning and Militancy” in *Melancholia and Moralism: Essays on AIDS and Queer Politics*, 137.

It's my contention that the linkages between sexuality and migration now serve as both cultural touchstone and powerful resource for the undocumented-youth movement. Social media, which allows unauthorized youth to speak to an imagined public of both allies and adversaries, has been critical to this development. Posting their stories online and announcing their status at rallies, marches, and conferences, undocumented youth show how such acts of self-disclosure and risk-taking are powerful enactments of political freedom. New forms of social media such as YouTube, Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram, and Facebook, the rise of open-source sites, and the increasing ease of generating original content have allowed undocumented youth to create an alternative public sphere. Beyond its creative component, social media's interactive and peer-based features allow the undocumented to circumvent traditional political elites and mainstream immigrant-rights organizations. Finally, online communication channels such as email, texting, and Skype have expanded the space of appearance for unauthorized populations, whose ability to travel freely is limited, allowing them to participate in multiple publics in ways inconceivable prior to the Internet.

The creation of such publics and counterpublics has allowed immigrant activists to challenge older forms of authority and representative speech, creating new spaces in which the undocumented are not objectified members of a criminalized population who are simply spoken *about* but instead are *speaking* subjects and agents of change. This proliferation of voices reveals heterogeneous views regarding the politics of incorporation and inclusion: While some DREAMers express familiar claims regarding nationalism, integration, and liberal recognition, the more radical segments of the undocumented-youth movement are putting forward critiques of U.S. policies regarding immigration, globalization, civic membership, and political engagement. Yet alongside its defiant attitude toward state power, undocumented activism *also* humanizes the victims of a neoliberal political system that seeks to create “a borderless economy and a barricaded border.”¹³ Turning to the political organizing of undocumented youth, I argue that the ideological diversity of this population requires engaging (rather than simply repudiating) the logic of citizenship: a category that undocumented activists criticize, question, and claim. Calling themselves DREAMers (based on their support for the DREAM Act¹⁴), this group of undocumented and often also LGBT

¹³ Nevins 2001, 135.

¹⁴ The DREAM Act stands for the Development, Relief and Education Act for Alien Minors Act. Introduced in 2001, the Act would extend a six-year conditional legal status to undocumented youth who meet several criteria, including: “entry into the United States before age 16; continuous presence in the United States for five years prior to the bill’s enactment; receipt of a high school diploma or its equivalent (i.e., a GED); and demonstrated good moral character. Qualifying youth would be authorized to work in the United States, go to school, or join the military. If during the six-year period they graduate from a two-year college, complete at least two years of a four-year degree, or

(lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) youth appropriated strategies of visibility developed during the gay-rights movement and chose to “come out” and openly declare their undocumented status.

In making the claim that DREAMers help to “queer” the politics of migration, my work echoes other scholars currently analyzing the relationship between radical immigrant-rights activism and queer world-making possibilities. Yet my analysis differs from those scholars who draw sharp divisions between practices that reinforce “national and territorial logics” versus a “queer ‘no borders’ imaginary” that refuses to traffic in liberal notions of “recognition, visibility, and representation.”¹⁵ Rather than pursue a disciplinary analysis capable of celebrating only those images or practices divorced from liberal conceptions of selfhood, I argue that one of the most powerful elements of “queer” politics has been its capacity to bridge everyday survival with a commitment to a liberatory politics. Here, I draw on Cathy Cohen’s vision of queer politics as a form of the political “built not exclusively on identities, but on identities as they are invested with varying degrees of normative power.”¹⁶ Written in 1997, Cohen’s intersectional vision of queer politics could easily incorporate the category of the undocumented or the “illegal” within her analysis of “punks, bulldaggers, and welfare queens.”¹⁷ Certainly citizenship status is yet another critical marker to one’s relationship to power and privilege shaped by race, class, gender, and sexuality. For Cohen, “one’s relation to power, and not some homogenized identity, if privileged in determining one’s political comrades... a politics where the nonnormative and marginal... is the basis for progressive transformative coalition work... [A] space in opposition to dominant norms, a space where transformational political work can begin.”¹⁸ Here, queer symbolizes “an acknowledgment that through our existence and everyday survival we embody sustained and multisited resistance to systems... that seek to normalize our sexuality, exploit our labor, and constrain our visibility. At the intersection of oppression and resistance lies the radical potential of queerness to challenge and bring together all those deemed marginal and all those committed to liberatory politics.”¹⁹

serve at least two years in the U.S. military, the beneficiary would be able to adjust from conditional to permanent residence status.” See Perez, *We Are Americans*, pp. xxi-xxii.

¹⁵ For examples of this type of critique, see Melissa Autumn White, “Documenting the Undocumented: Toward a Queer Politics of No Borders,” *Sexualities*, Vol. 17(8): 979; Belkis Gonzalez, *Getting Papers: The Terms of Legalizing Intimacies, Labors, and Kinship*, Unpublished PhD dissertation, New York University, 2013: 230-231.

¹⁶ Cathy Cohen, “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, Vol. 3, 452. .

¹⁷ Cohen, “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens,” 438.

¹⁸ Cohen, 438.

¹⁹ Cohen, 440.

Similarly, in her analysis of queer migration politics, Karma Chávez characterizes queerness as “a coalitional term, a term that always implies an intermeshed understanding of identity, subjectivity, power, and politics located on the dirt and concrete where people live, work, and play.”²⁰ For Chávez, queer migration politics often advances what she describes as a “*differential vision* of queer migration coalitional politics. A differential vision reflects an impure political orientation, whereby activists seek relationships to others who may take different approaches but who resist hegemonic power systems.”²¹ In this way, while the practice of “coming out” as undocumented is important, what is most productively “queer” about undocumented activism has less to do with visibility and “coming out” and more to do with the movement’s critique of sovereignty, survival, and preventable death.

Emphasizing peer-to-peer forms of communication that mix newer technologies with older forms of mobilization, undocumented youth are putting forward a “queer” vision of democracy — a participatory politics that rejects secrecy and criminalization in favor of more aggressive forms of nonconformist visibility, voice, and protest. This increasingly agonistic stance has led a number of undocumented youth to move away from the DREAMer identity in recent years, arguing that the movement needs to more fully challenge the language of deserving/undeserving and include the larger undocumented population who are not included in the DREAMer category.²² Articulating their views through art and poetry and across various social-media sites, this plethora of immigrant voices and analyses reflects a broad range of undocumented feeling. Angry, outraged, irreverent, audacious, funny, and sad, undocumented youth and their allies are expanding the affective and ideological range of undocumented political and cultural speech. Using new social media to queer the movement, undocumented youth are expressing more complex and sophisticated conceptions of loyalty, legality, migration, sexuality, and patriotism than those typically offered by politicians, pundits, and other political elites.

This ability to “queer” the politics of immigration — to operate successfully at the intersection of liberal inclusion and radical possibility and to bridge everyday survival with liberatory politics — is so far best epitomized by the DREAMers’ successful pressuring of President Barack Obama to sign an executive order granting undocumented youth “deferred action.” The implementation of

²⁰ Karma Chávez, 7.

²¹ Karma Chavez, 18.

²² See “How 5 DREAMers Are Rethinking Their Role In the Immigrant Rights Movement,” by Von Diaz, April 28, 2014 in Feet in 2 Words/Huffington Post, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/04/28/dreamers-immigrant-rights_n_5227646.html and <http://newlaborforum.cuny.edu/2015/01/19/dreamers-unbound-immigrant-youth-mobilizing/>

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) has thus far been one of the few policy victories for unauthorized individuals in recent years, and its existence is due primarily to the activism of DREAMers. In getting this order passed, DREAMers not only confronted the president during his reelection campaign but took on traditional immigrant-rights organizations that preferred a much more accommodationist approach. Activists used new social media to circumvent traditional gatekeepers on immigration policy, making direct demands on President Obama through a strategy of “participatory politics,” or “interactive, peer-based acts through which individuals and groups seek to exert both voice and influence on issues of public concern.”²³ The passage of DACA showed DREAMers to be engaged in a politics not of *voice* alone but also of *influence*. The passage of DACA also provided the legal and political precedent for Obama to issue his November 2014 executive order providing temporary residency to an additional four to five million unauthorized immigrants.²⁴ And while the November expansion of DACA faces continuing challenges in the courts and in Congress, the president — as well as most Democrats in Congress — seems committed to its future passage.²⁵

For those who qualify, the passage of DACA (and its future expansion) represents a complex victory. Executive action provides work authorizations as well as meaningful (though temporary) relief from the daily threat of deportation. The leadership of the undocumented-youth movement in getting the president to grant Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals shows how participatory online practices combined with grassroots organizing and protest can promote success in traditional political domains. Even more significantly, the fight for DACA represents a form of queer politics that (like AIDS activism) reflects a desire for power and a demand for government accountability from institutions that are far from just or accountable.

Historicizing Undocumented Organizing: The Marches of 2006

Unauthorized immigrants have long engaged in widespread protests. Throughout the twentieth century, fights for worker rights and against anti-immigrant legislation produced forms of undocumented resistance and activism; consider the mass protests in 1994 against the passage of

²³ Cohen, Kahne et al. 2012, vi.

²⁴ See “Dreamers Unbound: Immigrant Youth Mobilizing” by Walter Nicholls and Tara Fiorito in *New Labor Forum*, January 19, 2015, <http://newlaborforum.cuny.edu/2015/01/19/dreamers-unbound-immigrant-youth-mobilizing/>. See also “Obama, Daring Congress, Acts to Overhaul Immigration” by Michael D. Shear, *The New York Times*, November 20, 2014.

²⁵ See “Dealt Setback, Obama Puts Off Immigrant Plan” by Michael D. Shear and Julie Preston, *The New York Times*, February 17, 2015 and “U.S. to Seek Stay of Ruling on Obama Immigration Action,” Associated Press, February 20, 2015.

California's Proposition 187.²⁶ But it was the immigrant-rights protests of 2006 in which we saw a *nationwide* movement of undocumented subjects claiming visibility and giving voice to their dreams and frustrations. Across the country, the undocumented engaged in a wide array of mass actions, ranging from school walkouts to marches, street demonstrations, and work stoppages. Dressed in white and carrying multilingual signs with statements reading, "I Am a Worker, Not a Criminal," "Justice for All," and "Let Us Be a Part of the American Dream," immigrants sang the national anthem in both English and Spanish and waved the flags of their home countries alongside American flags.²⁷

The immigrant-rights marches in 2006 "were historic because of their size and because they took place in cities across the United States. An estimated 3 to 5 million people participated, with approximately 1.5 million people marching in 108 locations around the country between April 8 and April 10 alone.... In some cities, the immigration reform marches were the largest street demonstrations ever recorded."²⁸

These massive marches of 2006 marked an important shift in immigrant-rights politics and organizing. By refusing to obey the strictures of illegality, with its demands of silence and secrecy, the undocumented resisted the state's injunction that they remain unknown and faceless. Risking visibility and deportation in order to make their voices heard, they refused to participate in the economic and political logics that supported their exclusion and exploitation. Instead, protesters created an immigrant counterpublic in which they enacted the very rights and standing they were demanding from the government. Moreover, by creating a space of appearance where new forms of action could occur, noncitizens were engaging in acts of political freedom — what Hannah Arendt has described as the capacity for new beginnings. Arendt's focus on action as the uniquely human capacity to do the unexpected helps to foreground what I take to be one of the demonstrations' most significant aspects: its power as a moment of *initiation* and an inaugural performance of the political. By taking to the streets and claiming space and rights, immigrants and their allies created spaces of political freedom and common appearance where none existed before.²⁹

The 2006 protests saw little discussion of social media as a mobilizing force. With YouTube still a fledgling site and Facebook not yet available to the general public, efforts to mobilize the

²⁶ Garcia 1991, Flores 2003, Weber 1996.

²⁷ Portions of this section are drawn from my essay "Going Public: Hannah Arendt, Immigrant Action and the Space of Appearance."

²⁸ Galindo 2010, 37-38.

²⁹ Beltrán 2009, 596.

undocumented stressed traditional organizations and media outlets. The organizations and outlets most responsible for mobilizing immigrants (including the undocumented) included Spanish-language media — including television and (more particularly) talk radio — community-based organizations, Chicano/Latino student and community organizations, labor unions, the Catholic Church, immigrant hometown associations, and immigrant sports leagues.³⁰ In terms of the technology used to mobilize immigrant populations, organizers for the 2006 demonstrations were characterized as relying on “mass distribution of flyers, door-knocking, phone banking, and word of mouth.” And while some encouraged the use of “web sites, e-mail, and faxes,” activists used social media primarily to coordinate with those who were already members of community-based organizations. In general, when trying to spread information about the rallies and mobilize a mass base of participants, activists used social media less than more traditional forms of outreach such as ethnic media, “press conferences, radio, television, and newspapers.”³¹

In entering the public realm and engaging in street protest, the undocumented faced significant risk; given this, protesters often sought to reduce the perils of publicity by mobilizing the power of the democratic crowd. Through large-scale mass actions, undocumented protesters found ways to be politically visible while also remaining obscure and hard to identify. For example, by gathering and intermingling their bodies in public acts of protest, mass demonstrations made it difficult to distinguish citizen from non-citizen. In this way, the marches were able to sustain forms of visibility that also protected unauthorized immigrants choosing to enter the public realm. William Flores has characterized this sort of activism as “protection through collective action.”³² Similarly, while various undocumented individuals spoke onstage at the 2006 rallies (or spoke to journalists at the events), the views and voices of the vast majority of the undocumented were mostly articulated through signs and chants.

As other scholars have noted, the 2006 marches displayed considerable ideological heterogeneity. Alongside signs stating, “Let Us Be Part of the American Dream,” other marchers carried signs reading, “This Is Stolen Land” and, “Who’s The Real Illegal Alien?...Pilgrim!”³³ Alongside chants such as, “Today we march, tomorrow we vote,” other marchers chanted, “¡Aquí Estamos, y No Nos Vamos!” [Here we are, and we’re not leaving!] and its rejoinder, “¡Y Si Nos

³⁰ Barreto et al. 2009, Pallares and Flores González 2010.

³¹ Barreto et al. 2009, 744.

³² Flores 2003, 276, 273. See also Beltran 2009, 609-610.

³³ Beltrán 2009, 607.

Sacan, Nos Regresamos!” [...and if they throw us out, we’ll come right back!].³⁴ Some marchers and organizers resisted the movement’s more insurgent political claims, emphasizing the marchers’ peaceful, patriotic, and nonthreatening character. During the 2006 marches, for example, immigrants’ symbolic performances were often policed — for instance, leaders of various immigrant-rights organizations asked marchers to stop waving the flags of their home countries at rallies and instead wave only the American flag.³⁵

Such simultaneous acts of policing and protection were understandable considering the general public’s ongoing hostility toward the undocumented, but they also limited the possibilities for the undocumented to articulate more potentially complex forms of belonging that exceed the nationalist logic of the U.S. nation-state. The marches often reflected a “predominantly defensive character,” visible in signs stating, “We Are Not Terrorists” and, “We Are Not Criminals.”³⁶ Such beleaguered assertions reflected the dangers of responding in kind to nativist suspicions of immigrants. Both the waving of American flags and assertions of non-criminality placed marchers within political logics that are “inherently compromised.”³⁷

While the 2006 marches involved powerful acts of political critique and resistance, they also made arguments that could be used to support more conservative ends. For example, a number of liberal immigrant-rights organizations emphasized immigrants’ “strong work ethic, deep religious faith, and commitment to family as proof that noncitizens sought to join and strengthen the United States rather than subvert its identity and institutions.”³⁸ By this logic, not only do immigrants pose no threat to America’s identity and institutions — they actually shore up the traditional values that the country increasingly lacks. Such depictions seek to reassure an anxious and xenophobic public that immigrants (particularly Latino immigrants) are a nonthreatening, inherently conservative civic presence.

Historically, portraying immigrants who aspire to citizenship as both grateful and contributive has been used to make immigrants appear civically valuable and worthy of membership. Yet this play of xenophobia and xenophilia actually helps to sustain the dynamic of the foreigner as outsider: “liberal xenophilic deployment of the foreigner as the truest citizen... actually feeds the xenophobic

³⁴ De Genova 2010, 101.

³⁵ Galindo 2010, 38.

³⁶ De Genova 2010, 113.

³⁷ Galindo 2010, 113.

³⁸ Beltrán 2009, 596.

backlash against the nonconsenting immigrant.”³⁹ In other words, the very attributions used to make immigrants attractive (they work hard; they value family and tradition) can easily become the same qualities that make them threatening (they take our jobs; their patriarchal and homophobic traditions threaten our capacity for progress). Rendering immigrants forever foreign, the logic of xenophilia feeds into the xenophobia that pro-immigrant advocates are trying to overcome. Regardless of whether they are portrayed as “giving” or “taking” from the polity, immigrants remain Other, outside the boundaries of membership.

Undocumented and Acting Up: DREAMers and Queering of Immigrant Rights

The fact that xenophilic strategies of praise fail to overcome nativist hostility can be seen in America’s immigration politics since 2008. Under President Obama, a Democrat who engaged in xenophilic rhetoric in both his campaign and in office, the number of deportations actually increased: Since 2009, there have already been more deportations than during the two full presidential terms of George W. Bush. For most of its first term, the Obama administration pursued comprehensive immigration reform far less aggressively than an enforcement-driven immigration policy characterized by increased ICE (immigration and customs enforcement) raids and deportations.⁴⁰

With comprehensive reform increasingly unlikely, immigration-rights activism has focused on passage of the Development, Relief and Education Act for Alien Minors Act. Introduced in 2001, the DREAM Act would extend a six-year conditional legal status to undocumented youth who meet several criteria.⁴¹ As a discrete piece of legislation that applies to a particular segment of the immigrant population, the DREAM Act hardly represents comprehensive reform. Yet with its emphasis on children who did not “choose” to immigrate illegally and whose opportunities are limited through no fault of their own, the DREAM Act is a deeply xenophilic piece of legislation. The act embodies liberalism’s frequent deployment of the figure of the foreigner as “the truest citizen.”⁴² Patriotic, hard-working, and academically successful, DREAMers represent a population

³⁹ Honig 2003, 78.

⁴⁰ “Obama’s Deportation Record Worse Than Bush” 2012.

⁴¹ The criteria includes: “entry into the United States before age 16; continuous presence in the United States for five years prior to the bill’s enactment; receipt of a high school diploma or its equivalent (i.e., a GED); and demonstrated good moral character. Qualifying youth would be authorized to work in the United States, go to school, or join the military. If during the six-year period they graduate from a two-year college, complete at least two years of a four-year degree, or serve at least two years in the U.S. military, the beneficiary would be able to adjust from conditional to permanent residence status.” See Perez 2009, xxi-xxii.

⁴² Honig 2003, 78.

that is “innocent,” upstanding, and assimilated. Stories of young people who would qualify for the DREAM Act often emphasize their academic success, involvement in community and volunteer activities, and desire to engage in military service. Moreover, having come of age in the United States, these young people speak English (indeed, a number of DREAMers are English-dominant and therefore characterized as less “foreign” than other segments of the unauthorized populations). Still, despite the many ways that this population fits into liberal and xenophilic conceptions of the “good,” assimilated immigrant whose success “gives” to the nation, anti-immigrant sentiment and rhetoric have only risen.

Not only has Congress failed to pass the DREAM Act after more than a decade of activism and debate — anti-immigrant legislation at the state level has actually grown more virulent.⁴³ In Arizona, the 2010 passage of SB 1070 expanded the powers of state police officers to ask about the immigration status of anyone they stop and to hold those suspected of being illegal immigrants. The legislation requires police officers, “when practicable,” to detain people they reasonably suspect are in the country without authorization and to verify their status with federal officials, unless doing so would hinder an investigation or emergency medical treatment. The law also makes it a state crime — a misdemeanor — to not carry immigration papers. Following suit, in June 2011, Alabama passed HB 56 (the Hammon-Beason Alabama Taxpayer and Citizen Protection Act), requiring public schools to monitor the immigration status of new students and their parents and making it a felony for anyone to transport or house an undocumented immigrant. Nor are these anti-immigrant laws unusual — between 2010 and 2011, state legislatures passed 164 anti-immigration laws across the United States.⁴⁴

This combination of increased animosity toward immigrants at the state and local level, impatience with the inability to get the DREAM Act passed, and widespread congressional inaction are among the probable causes of activism’s increasingly oppositional nature. Moreover, faced with

⁴³ In April 2010, Republican Gov. Jan Brewer of Arizona signed into law SB 1070. SB 1070 expanded the powers of state police officers to ask about the immigration status of anyone they stop and to hold those suspected of being illegal immigrants. The legislation requires police officers, “when practicable,” to detain people they reasonably suspect are in the country without authorization and to verify their status with federal officials, unless doing so would hinder an investigation or emergency medical treatment. The law also makes it a state crime — a misdemeanor — to not carry immigration papers. In a similar vein, in June 2011, Alabama passed HB 56 (the Hammon-Beason Alabama Taxpayer and Citizen Protection Act). HB 56 requires public schools to collect the immigration status of new students and their parents and makes it a felony for anyone to transport or house an undocumented immigrant. HB 56 was signed into law by Republican Gov. Robert Bentley on June 9, 2011.

⁴⁴ See “164 Anti-Immigration Laws Passed Since 2010? A MoJo Analysis,” by Ian Gordon and Tasmeeen Raja, *Mother Jones*, March/April 2012. <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2012/03/anti-immigration-law-database>

mounting hostility and demonization and refusal to acknowledge crisis and suffering, such portrayals led DREAMers to pursue a strategy similar to what Douglas Crimp described as the need for people dying of AIDS to “wage a war of representation.”⁴⁵ In other words, despite a legislative logic that sought to frame undocumented youth in terms of nonthreatening innocence, the reality of being a community under attack led DREAM activism to develop an increasingly confrontational and creative character. Indeed, one of this activism’s most exciting and unanticipated aspects has been the appropriation of strategies of visibility developed during the gay-rights movement. The 2010 and 2011 “Coming Out of the Shadows” campaigns, for example, included a series of speeches by unauthorized youth who openly declared their undocumented status. Organized in an effort to build support for the DREAM Act, this campaign was explicitly modeled on the National Coming Out Day initiated in 1988 to promote LGBT rights.⁴⁶ During these rallies, DREAMers declared themselves “Undocumented and Unafraid” (expanding the slogan in 2011 to “Undocumented, Unafraid, and Unapologetic”). Since then, more and more unauthorized youth have chosen to reject secrecy in favor of claiming membership through a more aggressive politics of visibility and protest that includes cross-state pilgrimages, hunger strikes, bus tours, rallies, sit-ins, and other forms of direct action. Often LGBT youth themselves, many DREAM activists emphasize the linkages that exist between coming out as queer and coming out as undocumented.

For undocumented youth, coming out represents an effort to become civically legible and politically speakable.⁴⁷ Not surprisingly, the practice of coming out as undocumented quickly became a staple of immigrant youth politics. Equally significant, unauthorized youth began posting videos online telling their stories and openly naming themselves as undocumented. Openly proclaiming their status, DREAMers queer the politics of migration in ways that resonate with Michael Warner’s definition of *queer* as the rejection of “a minoritizing logic of toleration or simple political-interest representation in favor of a more thorough resistance to regimes of the normal.”⁴⁸ Understood in the context of traditional logics of sovereignty and kinship, queering the politics of immigration means opening up new possibilities to imagine political membership and political claim-making. By refusing the politics of innocence, questioning the state-centered logics of

⁴⁵ Crimp, 146.

⁴⁶ <http://www.hrc.org/ncod/>

⁴⁷ According to Diana Fuss, the process of coming out can be understood as “a movement into a metaphysics of presence, speech and cultural visibility.” In this way, to be out “is really to be in — inside the realm the visible, the speakable, and culturally intelligible.” See Fuss 1991, 4.

⁴⁸ Warner 1993, xxvi. In a similar vein, David Halperin argues that queer “demarcates not a positivity but a positionality vis-à-vis the normative.... ‘Queer’...describes a horizon of possibility whose precise extent and heterogenous scope cannot in principle be delimited in advance.” Halperin 1995, 62.

citizenship, and reconfiguring the criteria for political membership, DREAMers are queering the movement in ways that can't be "delimited in advance."

In characterizing DREAMers as queering the politics of migration, my analysis aligns with the work of Nicholas De Genova and his claim that the more militant elements of the 2006 marches reflect a "radically open-ended politics of migrant presence" that displays parallels with the "destabilizing politics of queer presence."⁴⁹ At the same time, however, my reading of DREAM activism does not presume that queerness is *always* and *only* productively transgressive or that queer politics inevitably "exceeds the normative confinements of citizenship."⁵⁰ Instead, my reading is indebted to Jasbir Puar's work on how normativities proliferate amid the complex and contradictory ways that queer subjects relate to nation-states. The very concept of "being out" as undocumented is capable of challenging the logic of sovereignty while shoring up notions of American exceptionalism, producing what Puar calls "homonationalism" — "the emergence of national homosexuality...that corresponds with the coming out of the exceptionalism of American empire." By considering the unexpectedly "*convivial* relations between queerness and militarism," the logic of homonationalism serves to mark "the distance between barbarism and civilization."⁵¹

The importance that DREAM activists place on undocumented youth "coming out" and telling their own stories is connected to a larger politics that insists that immigrant-rights organizing must be part of a "migrant youth-led" movement. Previously, in the context of American politics, immigrant-rights organizing was defined primarily by advocates speaking on behalf of the undocumented. In the context of congressional hearings or other sites of advocacy, it was often academics, advocates, and activists — not the undocumented themselves — who testified about the population's conditions and concerns. The danger of deportation and language barriers combined to render visibility and voice as unworkable strategies. And when the undocumented *did* speak out regarding their experiences, it was often in a representational capacity: organizations engaged in a process of selection in order to single out subjects who organizers thought would be good at representing this controversial category. Today, while the need for expertise, advocates, and allies persists, immigrant-rights politics is much more engaged in political actions in which the undocumented speak for themselves. This is even truer in the case of DREAM activists, a group

⁴⁹ De Genova 2010, 101.

⁵⁰ De Genova 2010, 101, 105,106.

⁵¹ Puar 2007, 11, 20.

whose sense of belonging and familiarity with American popular and political culture has led them to believe that it is they who should be determining this movement's direction and focus.

This emphasis on the political necessity of speaking for themselves and telling their own stories was clear during the "Coming Out of the Shadows" campaign in Chicago. Seeking to call attention and support to the DREAM Act, the 2010-11 campaign included a march concluding with a rally featuring a group of students publicly proclaiming their undocumented status.⁵² Modeled on the National Coming Out Day initiated in 1988, "Coming Out of the Shadows" was inspired by the struggle for LGBT rights and the idea of "coming out" as a political strategy.⁵³ The movement was also inspired by the civil-rights movement and their use of sit-ins, hunger strikes, freedom rides, and other forms of nonviolent civil disobedience. Using the slogan "Undocumented and Unafraid" and chanting, "No papers, no fear! Immigrants are marching here!", Chicago participants made it clear that this new phase of the movement would center on speaking out and publicly defying the rhetoric of criminalization. In claiming an oppositional stance of fearlessness, DREAMers push back against the logic of "guilty" parents and "innocent" children, putting forward a more agonistic account of membership that argues that it is the law, not the undocumented, that is illegitimate.

UndocuQueer: Social Media and Direct Action

Drawing on the precedent of the movement for LGBT rights, the undocumented-youth movement has queered the politics of migration by seeking transformation of existing social structures, rather than merely accommodation within them. Demanding an intersectional politics of migration and sexuality has been critical to this development. Just as with immigration activism, "there has been a proliferation of queer communication, community, and activism online since the emergence of the commercial web."⁵⁴ LGBT youth have been particularly active online: According to one of the largest online surveys of LGBT youth, two-thirds of the respondents said that being online helped them accept their sexual orientation; 35 percent said that being online was crucial to this acceptance. Many of the respondents said they came out online before doing so in "real life"; this was especially true for men (57 percent) but also true for many women as well (38 percent).⁵⁵ Not

⁵² To see videos from the "Coming Out of the Shadows Campaign" of 2010 and 2011, see http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HS93wb_jpAg&feature=related and http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MQOOvtn21_Q&feature=related.

⁵³ <http://www.hrc.org/ncod/>.

⁵⁴ O'Riordan 2007, 24.

⁵⁵ The 2000 study was the largest online survey ever conducted for GLBT youth. Conducted by OutProud, and Oasis Magazine, the survey was completed by 6,872 respondents aged 25 or under. See Gross 2007, xiii-ix.

surprisingly, then, for queer youth, who, “often feel isolated and rarely have access to a supportive queer community in their vicinity.... [g]oing online offers many folks an opportunity to shed the mask they wear in their ‘real lives’ — at home, at school, and at work.”⁵⁶ These issues of isolation and lack of support can be even more intense for undocumented youth, whose status makes it even more difficult to seek out a supportive community of similarly situated youth.

The National Immigrant Youth Alliance (NIYA) established an UndocuQueer website on which queer undocumented youth can post their stories online. In doing this, these youth draw on their lived experience to build “visibility and explore the intersections between mainstream immigrant rights and queer rights organizing spaces.” The emergence of such subjects was unexpected — particularly since, as Eithne Luibhéid argues, the very presence of queer undocumented youth challenges the longstanding tendency “to presume either that all queers are legal citizens or that all immigrants are heterosexual.”⁵⁷ In contesting this assumption, queer undocumented youth often frame their activism in terms of the intersections between a politics of migration and a politics of sexuality. Describing this dynamic on the NIYA website, activists identifying themselves as UndocuQueer wrote:

We are queer undocumented youth. We cannot afford to be in either the queer or undocumented closet. We cannot and will not hide; we cannot and will not let those who haven’t been in our shoes decide and tell us how to act, how to feel and that this isn’t our home. We have the right to be whoever we want to be and love whoever we want to love. It is a shame that the only path we have to legalization is to lead a heterosexual lifestyle. We shouldn’t and won’t conform to such ideas. We have a right to live and love to the full extent of our capacity.

We urge you to come out! Now is the time to come and proclaim that you’re UndocuQueer, Unafraid and Unashamed!⁵⁸

In stating that they “shouldn’t and won’t conform” to the idea that “the only path to legalization is to lead a heterosexual lifestyle,” queer DREAMers force the immigrant-rights movement to consider how sexuality has served as grounds for controlling what sorts of bodies and identities are granted entry into the nation-state. As scholars of migration and sexuality have noted, because the U.S. government does not recognize lesbian and gay relationships as a legitimate basis for acquiring permanent-resident status, lesbian/gay couples are denied access to one of the most common ways to become a legal permanent resident: through direct family ties.⁵⁹ Moreover, 1965 revisions to

⁵⁶ Gross 2007, ix.

⁵⁷ Luibhéid 2005, xxxv.

⁵⁸ <http://theniya.org/undocuqueer/>.

⁵⁹ This changed on June 26, 2013 when the Supreme Court ruled that the federal Defense of Marriage Act was unconstitutional. DOMA had defined marriage as a union between one man and one woman. Following June 26 ruling,

immigration law “not only reaffirmed lesbian and gay exclusion but also further codified heterosexual, nuclear-family relations as the primary basis for admission to the United States by reserving nearly three-quarters of all permanent immigration visas for people with those ties.”⁶⁰ By denaturalizing the limited and heteronormative logic of family defining immigration policy, queer critiques of immigration exposed how the U.S. immigration-control apparatus “significantly regulates sexuality and reproduces oppressive sexual norms that are gendered, racialized, and classed.”⁶¹ In doing this, queer DREAMers made explicit the connections between various forms of being “unauthorized.”⁶²

In 2012, artist and activist Julio Salgado began the “I Am UndocuQueer” art project. Encouraging undocumented queers to send him emails with a quotation “explaining what it means to them to be both queer and undocumented along with a photo of themselves from the waist up.”⁶³ Describing the posters, Karma Chávez writes:

Each poster features a single activist wearing a white T-shirt emblazoned with two purple-and-white badges, one reading “Undocumented and Unafraid”...the other

same-sex couples can start applying for green cards for same-sex binational couples. See “For Gay Immigrants, Marriage Ruling Brings Relief and a Path to a Green Card” by Julia Preston, *The New York Times* (June 27, 2013).

⁶⁰ Luibhéid 2005, xiii-xv. See also Cantú 2009. Lesbians and gays were barred for decades from entering the United States as legal immigrants. In 1990, exclusion based on sexual orientation was finally removed from immigration law.

⁶¹ Luibhéid 2005, x.

⁶² In a 2009 post entitled “Gays and Undocumented/Immigrants-Nativists and Homophobes: Two Sides of the Same Coin,” blogger and activist Perna Lal explores the potential links between these categories:

Status quo civil marriage and immigration laws often target and constrict behavior that is neither criminal nor wrong. Put under the lens, nativists and homophobes are two-sides of the same coin — the coin that hates, otherizes, marginalizes and oppresses the Other...

With-holding a...tool of governmentality.... In the case of immigrants, that would be ‘citizen.’ For the LGBTQ community right now, that would be ‘marriage’ — Both are arbitrary constructs, backed by the state that have evolved over time. At one point, only white property owning males were considered citizens and there was a time not too long ago that inter-racial marriages were illegal. Now we have gay and undocumented individuals who are fighting for the certain benefits not made available to them.

Homosexuals have to *do without marriage* because they are *homosexuals*.

Illegal Aliens have to *do without citizenship* because they are *illegals*....

A sentence to describe our situation ...

“We are here. We work alongside you, raise our kids alongside your kids, walk the same path, shop at the same stores, drive on the same highways, breath from the same air supply and drink from the same water source. The only difference is that we are treated as second-class in our own country, because we are ____ (gay/without papers).”

Here we see the significance of what it might mean for undocumented activists to queer the politics of migration. As Luibhéid argues, this definition of queer is valuable in its call “to transform rather than seek accommodation within existing social structures.” Such a definition “underscores that transformation needs to occur across a wide range of regimes and institutions, not just the sexual — but not without addressing the sexual, either. See <http://pernalal.com/2009/03/gays-and-undocumented-immigrants-nativists-and-homophobes-two-sides-of-the-same-coin/>.

⁶³ Karma Chavez, *Queer Migration Politics*, 101.

proclaiming “Queer & Unashamed”... Each image of a person is set against a bright, solid-colored backdrop and beneath the words “I am Undocuqueer.” Beside the image is the individual’s quotation and first name.⁶⁴

As Chávez notes, the UndocuQueer posters “simultaneously point towards more utopian and normative directions.”⁶⁵ Yet in noting this “normalizing impulse,” Chávez argues that because their political strategies emerge from “the realities of youths’ lived experience,” such normative aspirations “should be evaluated differently than if they were the aspirations of U.S. citizens.”⁶⁶ Here, we see how queerness for Chávez “not only refers to a kind of critique” to non- and anti-normative genders and sexualities — “it also implies what is possible for making lives livable.”⁶⁷

Yet alongside Chávez’s critique, other scholars of queer migrant politics have criticized the undocumented-youth movement for expressing the desire for visibility and representation made evident by Salgado’s art. Belkis Gonzáles, for example, states that “[b]oth visually and textually, the posters represent the UndocuQueers as autonomous liberal subjects.”⁶⁸ She continues:

What is occluded by these representations of UndocuQueers as individualist liberal subjects are critiques of structural inequalities; the discourse of personal freedom and authenticity cannot account for systemic disparities in treatment before the law and exclusion from economic security.⁶⁹

Similarly, Melissa White describes Salgado’s UndocuQueer project as utilizing “a bright and vibrant palette of colors through which he renders cartoon-like portraits of self declared undocuqueers. The festive colors make these portraits immediately non-threatening, positively representing undocuqueer identities and political subjectivities as resolutely cheerful, optimistic, brave and insistent.”⁷⁰ While acknowledging that these portraits open “promising space” for “new political subjectivities,” ultimately, White argues that queer migrant organizing should “move toward a queer ‘no borders’ imaginary that pushes the horizon for queer politics beyond both

⁶⁴ Chavez, *Queer Migration Politics*, 101-102.

⁶⁵ Chavez, *Queer Migration Politics*, 102.

⁶⁶ Chavez, *Queer Migration Politics*, 99, 111.

⁶⁷ Chavez, *Queer Migration Politics*, 6.

⁶⁸ Belkis Gonzáles, *Getting Papers: The Terms of Legalizing Intimacies, Labors, and Kinship*, Unpublished PhD dissertation, New York University, 2013: 230-231.

⁶⁹ Belkis Gonzáles, *Getting Papers*, 231.

⁷⁰ Melissa Autumn White, “Documenting the Undocumented: Toward a Queer Politics of No Borders,” *Sexualities* 2014, Vol. 17 (8): 987.

national and representational frameworks.”⁷¹ For White, such a future requires moving “beyond a politics of recognition, visibility, and representation toward a more thoroughgoing critique of how the control and regulation of mobility and identity function as a central technologies of capitalist sovereignty.”⁷²

Given that problematic and exclusionary logics are endemic to every movement, criticizing the limitations of the organizational and artistic strategies employed by undocumented activists is certainly a valid exercise. Moreover, I’m deeply sympathetic to the concept of a “no borders” imaginary that White and Belkis both champion. Nevertheless, their readings of Salgado’s UndocuQueer project seems to miss Chávez’s point that the desire for autonomy, visibility, and representation has distinctive logics when emerging through a queer migrant imaginary that is deeply racialized and classed.⁷³ Moreover, such critiques appear to overlook Cohen’s insight that a liberatory queer politics must be guided by “a radical intersectional left analysis” that seeks to account for “the roles that race, class, and gender play in defining people’s differing relations to dominant and normalizing power.”⁷⁴ For Cohen, such an analysis requires getting past “simple dichotomies such as powerful/powerless; oppressor/victim; enemy/comrade.”⁷⁵ In thinking about queer migrants, I would add additional dichotomies such as liberal/radical; nation-state/no borders; sovereign/diasporic; visibility/subjectless; autonomy/collectivities; deserving/undeserving; individual/anti-identitarian; agency/disruption; and normative/utopian also serve as simple dichotomes that don’t serve our analysis.

Instead, such critiques reflect the somewhat limited project of policing the borders of radical resistance by ferreting out the traces of liberal subjectivity and the desire for sovereignty made visible by the efforts of undocumented to articulate new visions of membership and belonging. What such an approach misses is what Douglas Crimp characterizes as the need to “wage a war of representation.” Discussing media representations of AIDS (in particular MOMA’s 1988 exhibition of Nicholas Nixon’s photographs, “Pictures of People,” featuring PWAs taken over a period of time) Crimp writes: “what we see first and foremost in Nixon’s photographs is their reiteration of what we have already been told or shown about people with AIDS: that they are ravaged,

⁷¹ Melissa Autumn White, “Documenting the Undocumented,” 979.

⁷² White, “Documenting the Undocumented,” 979.

⁷³ Chavez, *Queer Migration Politics*, 6.

⁷⁴ Cohen, “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens,” 457.

⁷⁵ Cohen, “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens,” 460.

disfigured, and debilitated by the syndrome; they are generally alone, desperate, but resigned to their ‘inevitable’ deaths.”⁷⁶ ACT UP protested the Nixon show with pictures of friends, lovers, and family who were living with AIDS. The flyer they passed out that stated: “We demand the visibility of PWAs who are vibrant, angry, loving, sexy, beautiful, acting up and fighting back. STOP LOOKING AT US: START LISTENING TO US.”⁷⁷ Here, we see how Cohen’s call for a “nuanced understanding of power” allows us to consider how differently located subjects have different relationships to the politics of visibility and representation.

Undocumented and Online: Multiple Voices and New Affective Terrain

Much of the DREAMers’ newfound visibility relies on forms of new social media such as YouTube and Facebook. Utilizing a wide array of social-media sites, DREAMers have been creating online content that speaks to an imagined public of both allies and adversaries: Web series such as “Undocumented and Awkward” and “UndocuCribs” and Facebook groups such as UndocuQueer show the many ways in which social media operates as a space of confrontation, contemplation, and self-assertion as well as education, creative self-expression, and mass mobilization.

One of the most significant political effects of social media has been its capacity to pluralize the stories of DREAMers. Sites such as DreamActivist.org seek to “compile as many stories as possible to show the circumstances and factors that led us to this point in our lives, to share our immigrant experiences, stories of struggles and stories of success.”⁷⁸ Describing itself as a “multicultural, migrant youth-led, social media hub,” DreamActivist.org claims to have collected “the biggest archive of undocumented youth stories on the web.”⁷⁹ Chronicling the stories and struggles of undocumented youth from Brazil, Mexico, Colombia, Ecuador, South Korea, Taiwan, Chile, Croatia, Fiji, Israel, Peru, France, Pakistan, Venezuela, Nigeria, Mali, Guatemala, Argentina, Haiti, Ghana, Costa Rica, Indonesia, Thailand, Bangladesh, Senegal, Lebanon, and the Philippines, DreamActivist.org and other organizations that solicit submissions seek to create an online community in which the undocumented speak for themselves.

By using the Internet to post first-person accounts of their political actions and life stories, immigrant youth are creating “cyber-*testimonios*” — a form of speech they hope will allow them to

⁷⁶ Crimp, 86.

⁷⁷ Crimp, 87.

⁷⁸ <http://www.dreamactivist.org/about/our-stories/>.

⁷⁹ <http://www.dreamactivist.org/about/>.

articulate political alternatives that can be shared across time and space. *Testimonio* can be defined as “a nonfictional, popular-democratic form of epic narrative...told in the first person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist or witness of the events he or she recounts, and whose unit of narration is usually a ‘life’ or a significant life experience.”⁸⁰ In describing the quotidian experiences of a singular life, individuals are creating narratives that draw on this combination of the epic and the democratic. Moreover, such acts of speech share *testimonio*’s “sense of urgency.... [I]t must above all be a story that needs to be told, that involves some pressing and immediate problem of communication.”⁸¹

Open-content projects created by a multitude of users (such as Wikipedia) “eschew authority: its information is not authoritative and there are no authors.”⁸² In this context, “knowledge is not a zero-sum game because it is easily accessible to all: knowledge is not information but rather the ability to do creating things with information.”⁸³ And while online testimonials are not exactly akin to open-content projects such as Wikipedia, they are projects in which there is no single author — a multitude of users can post their individual stories. Proliferating in ways that resist being screened or controlled, the Internet is not simply a space of education and mass mobilization but a space where both positive and negative affect can flourish. Not only patriotic and inspiring, the voices of the undocumented online are also sarcastic, angry, funny, ironic, enraged, and brash.

This profusion of cyber-*testimonios*, their voices and perspectives, reflects the political range of DREAM activism. For example, many activists have posted their stories online prior to committing acts of civil disobedience. The videos often open with a DREAMer stating his or her name and state of residence. A significant aspect of this sort of “coming out” online has been the practice of giving one’s full name and naming one’s “taboo” status (as undocumented, queer, or both). Some state, “If you are watching this, it’s because I’ve been arrested.” The videos are typically built around first-person narratives regarding the speaker’s status, why he or she feels that coming out is important, and urging others to come out and join the movement. Georgina Perez, a member of the Georgia DREAMers, posted a video online in April 2011; it states in full:

My name is Georgina Perez, I’m undocumented, and I am unafraid. I was brought to the U.S. when I was 3 years old. Currently I’m 21 years old. I’m ready to stand up and fight back for my community. Throughout the last five years, as undocumented youth, we have done everything in order to get open dialogue with elected officials and politicians. In good faith, we’ve waited and waited, and instead we’ve been given the runaround. We’ve done the petitions, we’ve done the flyer, the

⁸⁰ Beverley 2004, 33, 31.

⁸¹ Beverley 2004, 61.

⁸² Chun 2006, 170

⁸³ Chun 2006, 170.

lobbying, the protests, the rallies, and instead of our voices being heard, we're just not seeing any change. We're seeing that our communities are being criminalized; we're seeing racist legislation; we're seeing family separation. And that's why today I'm coming out as undocumented and unafraid. I will no longer stand and wait for someone to come and save me. I will no longer wait for someone to come dictate and tell me what to do while I'm being denied the access to higher education. I'm tired of politicians always using us as a scapegoat, always criminalizing us, in order for them to win a seat. I'm tired of that. I'm not going to apologize for my mother bringing me here. I'm not going to apologize for speaking my native language. I'm a proud Georgian; I'm a proud Mexicana.

I was brought to this country by a very, very courageous woman. She's my hero, my mother. And she left everyone and everything she knew behind in order for her to give me a better life. So I'm not going to let anyone or anything stop me from getting my higher education; I'm not going to let her sacrifices be in vain. I'm not, 'cause she's my hero. And I'm not going to blame her — I thank her for bringing me here.

I'm tired of students like Jessica [Colotl, then a Kennesaw State University senior facing deportation] being persecuted for trying to get a basic education. When Jessica's case went public here in Georgia, a lot of us, a lot of us went deeper into the shadows. And we became scared. Many allies told us to be quiet, to take a step back, you know, because the environment is not good — just be quiet. But I've come to the realization that in order for us to beat this, we have to show them that we're more unafraid than ever before. I want to stand up and ask these legislators, Do you really, really want to be on the wrong side of history?

I want to... I stand here. I ask these legislators to stop criminalizing our communities, because the more you do this, we're not going to stay quiet anymore. We're tired of that. We're not going to stand back. We're not going to be silent. We're not going to be in the shadows. We're not going to let this happen any longer. We're going to step up and fight for our communities.

So I'm asking you — my ally, my friend, my fellow undocumented student, youth — are you going to be on our side? Or which side are you going to be on? Because me, as an undocumented youth, I know where I stand; I know on which side of history I'm going to be on. My name is Georgina Perez, I'm undocumented, and I am no longer afraid.⁸⁴

North Carolina DREAM Team member Viridiana Martinez posted another video on the same April 2011 day; it states in full:

My name is Viridiana Martinez; I am undocumented. If you're watching this video, I've been arrested. I grew up in the small town of Sanford, North Carolina. I'm a proud North Carolinian. I'm a taxpayer. But most importantly, I am a human being whose dreams have been denied. Why did I take part in an act of civil disobedience, putting my freedom on the line? Why would I willingly face deportation, risking my future in my own home? Because I've had enough. My people are being criminalized for crossing borders to seek a better life while the industries that drove us here are not being held accountable. My community is under attack by legislation that strips people of their humanity. Our human right to an education is under attack and has been for years because our own senator, Kay Hagan, has denied the dreams of 51,000 North Carolinian youth. Remaining in the shadows is no longer acceptable. Protesting, rallying, and lobbying is no longer enough. If you're watching this and have not spoken out, it's time you come out and declare yourself undocumented and unafraid. If you tirelessly pushed for the DREAM Act last year and feel like giving up, don't. It's time to escalate. So which side are *you* on? There is no neutral ground. Will you speak out with me or silently join our oppressors?⁸⁵

⁸⁴ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mTeh1m0qiEU&feature=youtu.be>.

⁸⁵ http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Fbo4NT_p5M&feature=youtu.be.

The videos are powerful in their complex and audacious claims to membership and rights. Martinez claims rights as a “taxpayer” even as she also names herself a “proud North Carolinian” while Perez states that she is “not going to apologize for speaking my native language” and that she is a “proud Georgian” as well as “a proud Mexicana.” In a similar vein, Martinez describes Kay Hagan as “our own senator” while Perez claims that elected officials and politicians have given petitioners “the runaround.” Both of these DREAMers claim themselves as Southerners who have the authority to criticize and make demands on elected representatives. In this way, their affective ties to the South also represent acts of resistance — both women are asserting their rights as deserving members of a polity that refuses to claim them. In their refusal to “apologize” for their actions, both fight any characterization of the undocumented as unlawful subjects who have committed an offense. Instead, they name immigration policies, the U.S. political process, and the misdeeds of politicians as the sites of wrongdoing and offense.

In their demands for both government accountability and proper representation, both Perez and Martinez echo the earlier claims of AIDS activists who accused the government of failing “at every level to provide the funding necessary to combat the epidemic.”⁸⁶ Claiming that “[s]cientific research, health care, and education are the responsibility and purpose of government and not of so-called private initiative,” ACT UP sought to “enlist the powers of sovereignty for our own democratic or redistributive agendas.”⁸⁷ In a similar vein, Ann Cvetkovich quotes AIDS activist Zoe Leonard stating that “there was a criminally negligent response on the part of the government, the medical community, the pharmaceutical companies, and the educators of this country.”⁸⁸

Even more significantly, both Perez and Martinez refuse to accept the criminalizing logic of unauthorized border crossings. For Perez, this refusal is tied to her identity as a daughter and her relationship to her mother. Rather than blaming her mother for her own status as undocumented, Perez tearfully expresses love, respect, and gratitude for her mother’s choices, saying, “I’m not going to blame her for bringing me here” and calling her “a very, very courageous woman” and “my hero.” In a more structural vein, Martinez situates unauthorized migration within a critique of the neoliberal policies of globalization. As she states, “my people are being criminalized for crossing borders to seek a better life while the industries that drove us here are not being held accountable.” Refusing to ignore the economic factors that integrate economies but segregate

⁸⁶ Crimp, 31.

⁸⁷ Honig, *Antigone*, p. 2.

⁸⁸ Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings*, 194.

populations, Martinez boldly rejects the logic of guilt and criminalization, offering instead a call to mass protest that is both angry and determined (“which side are *you* on? There is no neutral ground”). Perez and Martinez’s speech regarding the structural and the affective dynamics of immigration explodes the simplistic logic of “legal/illegal” and puts a human face on the complex dynamics of migration as the space of economic arrangements, human desire, and community building.

Refusing to abide by nationalist scripts that demand immigrants express only love and gratitude toward the United States, both young women express anger and frustration with the US political system, calling for an intensification of mass actions (Perez: “In order to beat this, we have to show them that we’re more unafraid than ever before”; Martinez: “It’s time to escalate”). Such actions reflect a new spirit of freedom on the part of DREAMers that is collective but not representative. Here we see what Cvetkovich characterizes as the link between trauma and migration. According to Cvetkovich queer theory can “help illuminate how immigration produces queer, or nonnormative, versions of national identity and the nation. Migration can traumatize national identity, producing dislocation from or loss of an original home or nation. But if one adopts a queer and depathologizing approach to trauma and refuses the normal as an ideal or real state, the trauma of immigration need not be ‘healed’ by a return to the ‘natural’ nation of origin or assimilation into a new one.”⁸⁹

Refusing allies’ advice to “be quiet,” Perez refuses to “wait for someone to come dictate and tell me what to do,” stating that “I will no longer stand and wait for someone to come and save me.” Calling on her fellow DREAMers and allies to join her, she argues that “in order for us to beat this, we have to show them that we’re more unafraid than ever before.”

In recording themselves prior to potential arrest and deportation, DREAM activists such as Perez and Martinez hope to turn the politics of surveillance upside down. “Surveillance is a discourse.... [T]he various techniques of surveillance — identification, monitoring, analysis and response — are routinized, regulated, and institutionalized practices that produce and circulate knowledge.”⁹⁰ By creating cyber-*testimonios* that give their names and status, undocumented youth seek to turn the surveillance state against itself, producing forms of visibility that are not a trap but instead serve as a form of protection. Moreover, by going online and proclaiming themselves undocumented, activists expose the limits of liberal notions of privacy. As an antidote to

⁸⁹ Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings*, 119, 121.

⁹⁰ Phillips and Cunningham, “Queering Surveillance Research,” p. 34.

surveillance, “privacy has proved an insufficient response, intellectually, rhetorically, and legally.... [P]rivacy protects the autonomous individual,” but practices of surveillance “are fundamentally about the creation of social knowledge, social positions, and social order.”⁹¹ Because of DREAMers’ social position as “undocumented,” the private realm serves as the site of a social order characterized by secrecy, exploitation, and fear. In this way, DREAM activists’ use of the Internet highlights privacy’s failure as a form of protection. At the same time, however, engaging the politics of surveillance is a dangerous and uncertain game. Publicly naming oneself online could easily lead to arrest, deportation, and other forms of state violence. Moreover, vulnerability and visibility is re-enacted on the Internet: One’s visibility now has a kind of permanence, as your online presence retains a life beyond the initial post.

As noted earlier, new social media allow for the proliferation of expressive practices and critiques produced by a diverse group of undocumented youth. Given this, the Internet shows not only the agonistic critiques of women like Perez and Martinez but more liberal depictions of DREAM activism. Consider the website *We Are America: Stories of Today’s Immigrants*, which presents posts drawing on more liberal narratives of service and membership. An example:

My name is Carlos Roa, and I am America. My family and myself came to the United States back in 1989. I was only 2 years old. My grandfather came to this country in 1948, a U.S. citizen since 1958. And he had the opportunity to realize his American dream. My dad tried year after year to get us legalized and spent tens of thousands of dollars for lawyers, and still, nothing. It’s been twenty years. People think it’s as easy as getting behind a line; it’s not like that...

I graduated in 2005 from high school, and I wanted to get into college; I wanted to join the military. And those options weren’t — I couldn’t do any of that. And so it’s frustrating — the fact that I wanna give back and I’m willing to serve this country in military service, and I don’t even have the option to do so. When you’re shooting down people’s dreams, that’s bad. It’s bad for everyone....

If you work hard and if you try and you strive and you can realize your potential and you can be a contributing member to society — that’s something that this country has prided itself on. And we’ve seen that — at the turn of the century, we saw how immigrants changed this nation for the better. Of Irish, of Polish, of Italian descent — how they were able to shape...very much change this nation for the better and make this country better. We are no different than the immigrants of the past.⁹²

Roa, a student studying architecture at Miami Dade College, is a DREAM activist — he was one of four students who in 2010 walked 1,500 miles to Washington, D.C., as part of the “Trail of Dreams.” Yet alongside his activism, Roa’s testimonial hews to a xenophilic narrative of the good and “giving” foreigner. Unlike Perez and Martinez, who criticize American policies and name

⁹¹ Phillips and Cunningham, “Queering Surveillance Research,” p. 33.

⁹²<http://weareamericastories.org/videos/carlos-the-story-of-an-undocumented-student/>.

themselves “undocumented and unafraid,” Roa states that “I am America” and characterizes himself as a patriotic subject willing to serve in the military during wartime.⁹³ Here we can see an example of the homonationalism Puar discusses. While risking deportation in order to “come out” as undocumented, Roa’s act of visibility is premised on his willingness to serve as an exceptional patriot, a “tolerable ethnic” willing to serve in the military and protect Americans from various “intolerable ethnics” such as terrorists.⁹⁴ Similarly, in speaking of the United States as a land of hard work and opportunity, Roa tries to situate his own family’s story in the larger story of European immigration in America (“We are no different than the immigrants of the past”). While such efforts are understandable, they also work to sustain the binary of “good immigrants” versus “bad immigrants” — those who are worthy of “being folded (back) into life” and those whose lives are understood to be of less value.⁹⁵

In contrast to the homonationalist logic of Roa’s more liberal narrative, the group Dreamers Adrift has pursued on a more agonistic approach that uses humor and irony to critique U.S. immigration policy. As an online media project “by undocumented youth and for undocumented youth” Dreamers Adrift features a series of skits entitled “Undocumented and Awkward,” highlighting the many ways that being young and undocumented can be humiliating and/or frustrating. The skits also often take on the issue of being queer as yet another way in which one’s marginal status renders one a second-class subject. In using skits, blogs, and raps, Dreamers Adrift posts stories that are more oppositional, angry, and funny than traditional, familiar forms of immigrant testimony.

For example, Jesus Iñiguez, a co-founder of Dreamers Adrift, uses rap to offer critique and create political community. Recorded while driving in his car, his March 2011 rap “To All My DREAMheads” addresses allies and aims to create community among fellow activists across the state and nation:

E.S.L. in the flesh comin’ through
With another fresh DREAM Act sesh for my cats and ladies
Allies, undocumented folks, anchor and terror babies
Like that senator from Texas said
Too many conspiracy theories get into his head, y’all
And he’s in a position where he could be votin’
On some pretty cool decisions
Affecting our communities

⁹³ <http://www.trail2010.org/about/>.

⁹⁴ Puar 2007, 25

⁹⁵ Puar 2007, 35.

Acting without impunity
 But he ain't foolin' me
 'Cause I grew to be
 Skeptical of politicians
 'Cause lately they be actin' vicious and brainless and shameless
 The type of shit they be pullin' in Congress is heinous
 No taxation without representation
 They don't even know the type of shit that we be facin' on the day to day
 Livin' on a daily basis
 Havin' to deal with these elephant nutcases
 Makin' us out to be one of the main rivals
 Feelin' entitled 'cause they be skimmin' through the Bible
 But that's not what Jesús would do
 I gotta make a move 'cause I'm through payin' dues
 And I'm through being used and abused and refused
 This is the true here: Fuck Fox News
 I got nothin' to lose
 That's why I'm politickin'
 You're trippin' if you're thinkin' that I'm gonna shut my mouth
 Undocumented and proud and unafraid
 On a legal crusade to get paid
 Don't hate
 I'm tryin' to get my paperwork straight
 And get all my documents in order
 I'm only gettin' older
 And I'm tryin' to kick it on this side of the border
 'Cause life expectancy on the other side is shorter
 It's a sad reality but shit is crazy
 But the threat of goin' back don't faze me
 It makes me wanna organize
 You best to recognize right propaganda lies
 So I hope it opens your eyes and we can stick together
 This endeavor bonded us forever
 Remember: If we can stick together then we've already won
 DREAM Act now two-zero-one-one
 This goes out to DREAM Team L.A. and the O.C. DREAM Team, FUEL from Long Beach,
 and all the other DREAM Act organizations around this nation organizing around this
 legislation.⁹⁶

In contrast to Roa's effort to create a narrative of immigration that links the undocumented to earlier waves of "good" immigration, Iñiguez uses phrases such as "anchor and terror babies" to mock those who would accuse the undocumented of being takers and terrorists. Using humor, anger, and irony, Iñiguez's rap aggressively criticizes politicians (who are characterized as vicious,

⁹⁶<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SvVGLSgAHMU> Or see Dreamers Adrift Channel:
http://www.youtube.com/user/dreamersadrift?feature=results_main.

brainless, and shameless). Iñiguez is particularly harsh toward right-wing media and politicians, referring to “those elephant nutcases” and telling his listeners to “fuck Fox News.” Yet despite its agonistic words, the rap maintains a playful and hopeful tone, telling Iñiguez’s fellow DREAMers that “this endeavor bonded us forever” and that “if we can stick together then we’ve already won.” Moreover, with its concluding shout-out to various Southern California DREAM organizations, the rap is clearly aimed not at convincing skeptical citizens but at undocumented youths themselves — those who see themselves as part of the fight for immigrant rights. And finally, the fact that Iñiguez is rapping while driving is politically significant: Because California had not yet granted the undocumented driver’s licenses, the act of driving in the video served as a quotidian and unspoken act of defiance that frames the rap as a whole.

No Deference: Confronting Obama and the Fight for Administrative Relief

If we define queer as the space of transformation rather than accommodation and build on Michael Warner’s earlier claim that a “queer” politics draws on a “dissatisfaction with the regime of the normal in general,” we can make sense of how DREAM activists have worked to challenge the “normal business” of immigration advocacy in Washington, D.C.⁹⁷ When the DREAM Act failed to pass Congress yet again in December 2010 and anti-immigrant efforts continued to increase at the state level, acts of civil disobedience grew in size and intensity. The practice of “coming out” as undocumented was also gaining momentum, most notably in June 2011 when Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Jose Antonio Vargas came out as undocumented in a *New York Times Magazine* essay. Headlined “My Life as an Undocumented Immigrant,” the Filipino’s story of coming out as both gay and undocumented reflected the democratic desires and frustration of immigrants and their allies.⁹⁸

Immigration activists and advocates were also becoming increasingly alarmed over the Obama administration’s extraordinarily high rates of deportation — a record that includes about 1.1 million deportations, more than under any president since the 1950s.⁹⁹ In 2011, DREAMers began calling on Obama to issue an executive order to stop deportations and allow undocumented youth the

⁹⁷ Warner 1993, xxvii.

⁹⁸ Vargas 2011. A year later, Vargas (along with a number of other undocumented individuals) graced the cover of *Time Magazine* with the title, “We Are Americans.” Vargas also wrote a follow-up essay for *Time* under the title “Not Legal, Not Leaving.”

⁹⁹ Preston and Cushman 2012. See <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/16/us/us-to-stop-deporting-some-illegal-immigrants.html?pagewanted=all>.

opportunity to obtain work permits, driver's licenses, and other forms of documentation. This increasingly confrontational approach can be seen in a Dreamers Adrift video uploaded to YouTube on Oct. 1, 2011, in which DREAM activists take turns aggressively confronting the president. Accusing Obama of showing “no leadership...in the protection of our civil liberties,” DREAMers accuse the president of standing on the sidelines while millions of undocumented are criminalized and deported.¹⁰⁰ Claiming it is their “duty” to confront the president, DREAMers state, “Presidents in the past have signed executive orders” and demand that Obama “grant administrative relief to all DREAM Act-eligible youth.”¹⁰¹

Mainstream immigrant-advocacy groups did not embrace this confrontational approach. “[W]orried about the effect of pushing Obama publicly on the contentious issue in the midst of his re-election campaign,” traditional organizations were “angry at Obama but terrified of Mitt Romney.” Many advocates were afraid to lean on the White House publicly for fear of hurting the president's electoral chances and electing a Republican who had already publicly stated that he would “veto any DREAM Act that reached his desk.”¹⁰² In the face of such electoral anxiety, it fell on DREAMers to take the lead on making demands on the White House. DREAMers were the first group to ask the president to take administrative action — a request that leaders of the Congressional Hispanic Congressional Caucus made only *after* DREAMers had made a similar request to Obama senior adviser Valerie Jarrett earlier that year.¹⁰³

Ultimately, it was DREAM activists outside Washington who developed their own plan to pressure Obama. In early June, Veronica Gomez and Javier Hernandez, undocumented immigrant activists with the National Immigrant Youth Alliance, occupied the president's Denver campaign office, staging a six-day hunger strike while camped inside the Obama for America offices.¹⁰⁴ The action effectively closed the campaign's office to visitors and volunteers. Following the Denver action, DREAM activists pledged to carry out acts of civil disobedience in Democratic campaign offices across the country. If Obama refused to pass administrative relief, his campaign would face a summer of direct-action protests just as he was working to secure the Latino vote in swing states

¹⁰⁰ President Obama: Administrative Relief NOW!!
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ycK_j3MHGtA&feature=relmfu.

¹⁰¹ President Obama: Administrative Relief NOW!!
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ycK_j3MHGtA&feature=relmfu.

¹⁰² Ross 2012. See: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/08/19/deferred-action-immigration-program_n_1786099.html.

¹⁰³ Ross 2012.

¹⁰⁴ Hing 2012. See: http://colorlines.com/archives/2012/06/dreamers_planned_obama_campaign_office_sit-ins_force_deportation_standoff.html.

such as Colorado, Nevada, and Florida. DREAMers put out statements saying that unless Obama took major action, mass protests would continue until the November election

Frustrated, angry, and savvy, DREAM activists echoed the political logic of groups such as ACT UP and Queer Nation that challenged the government's decision to view AIDS not as "an emergency" but as "merely a permanent disaster."¹⁰⁵ Let down by both parties, undocumented youth refused to behave like typical Washington-based advocacy groups and wait until after the election to make their voices heard. Unwilling to engage in business as usual, DREAMers sought to queer the "normal business" of immigration politics, with its criminalization of families and its daily politics of state violence and mass deportation. Instead, in the summer of 2012, DREAMers approached the ongoing attacks on the undocumented as an emergency rather than a permanent disaster. Here we see how DREAMers offer a critique of power, but they also express a desire to *have* power. Such desires reflect the need to "bridge everyday survival with a commitment to a liberatory politics."¹⁰⁶

Desire and Aversion: Gothic Membership in a Xenophobic Age

On August 14, 2012, San Antonio Mayor Julian Castro became the first Latino to deliver a keynote address at the Democratic National Convention. That same day, a group of undocumented immigrants arrived at the DNC in Charlotte, N.C. Part of the "No Papers, No Fear" Ride for Justice, these activists had been on a cross-country tour since July, traveling on what they called the UndocuBus. Dissatisfied by Obama's deferred-deportation order, riders continued to criticize the administration and draw attention to what they characterized as the president's "flawed and unjust immigration record." Gathering on a main route leading to the Time Warner Cable Arena, riders entered the center of the intersection, where they knelt on a colorful banner that read, "*Sin Papeles, Sin Miedo*" ("No Papers, No Fear") and held signs reading "Undocumented" above their heads. After ignoring a bilingual dispersal order, ten protesters were handcuffed one at a time and placed into police vans, where they continued to chant, "Undocumented, unafraid!" When all ten arrestees were released the following morning without being processed by Immigration and Customs Enforcement, UndocuBus riders celebrated their release while tweeting, "We know this is not the

¹⁰⁵ Crimp 1993, 304.

¹⁰⁶ Cvetkovich, 176.

norm, that every day [they] separate families.”¹⁰⁷ This same day, the DNC made history by inviting an undocumented immigrant (Benita Veliz) to address the delegates.

These contemporaneous inaugural acts are striking: In a two-day period, the first Latino gave the keynote address inside the Democratic National Convention while outside the hall, undocumented activists protested the president’s immigration record. The next day, these same DREAMers used Twitter to publicize their arrest (and release) while a fellow activist gave a speech praising Obama at the Democratic National Convention. Such acts vividly illustrate how DREAMers’ engagement with media both confirm *and* challenge traditional expressions of loyalty and membership. Putting a human face on neoliberal approaches to state power, DREAMers are neither solely grateful nor perpetually disaffected. Instead, undocumented youth are more akin to what Bonnie Honig refers to in *Democracy and the Foreigner* as “gothic subjects.” In these final pages, I want to suggest that by queering immigration activism, DREAMers demonstrate a productively democratic and gothic definition of political membership.

Asking, “what genre should we read texts of democratic theory?”, Honig argues that most democratic theorists read democracy “through the mode of romance.... Obstacles are met and overcome, eventually the right match is made and the newlywed couple is sent on its way to try to live happily ever after.”¹⁰⁸ But what if we read democracy through a different genre? For Honig, the most apt genre would be *gothic* romance, a genre that “trades on the reader’s uncertainty as to whether that apparently rescuing foreigner is really a hero or villain.”¹⁰⁹ Reading democracy through “a gothic lens” allows us to cultivate forms of civic passion and involvement that also allow us to “nurture some ambivalence”¹¹⁰ regarding leaders, ideals, and institutions:

Often in gothics, it turns out that...[t]he nice guy and the scary one are often the same person. The president who introduces vast new social welfare programs is the same one who escalates the war in Vietnam....¹¹¹

Gothic readers know that we may passionately support certain heroes (or principles or institutions) in political life while also knowing that we ought not take our eyes off them for fear of what they might do to us if we did. They know that one can be passionately attached to something — a nation, a people, a principle — and be deeply and justifiably (and even therefore!) afraid at the same time...democratic subjects related ambivalently, gothically, and, yes, passionately, to their leaders their nations, their state institutions, and all their sites of belonging.¹¹²

¹⁰⁷ Knefel 2012. See <http://nopapersnofear.org/blog/post.php?s=2012-09-06-no-papers-no-fear-risking-deportation-at-the-dnc>.

¹⁰⁸ Honig 2003, p.109.

¹⁰⁹ Honig 2003, 109.

¹¹⁰ Honig 2003, 112, 118.

¹¹¹ Honig 2003, 119.

¹¹² Honig 2003, 120-121.

DREAMers' relationship to both President Obama and the United States reflects this sort of ambivalent and affectively complex passion. Rather than seeing immigration as a xenophilic celebration of patriotism, thinking about it through a gothic lens helps us develop a richer and more complex approach to membership. As gothic subjects, for example, DREAMers "do not expect power to be granted to them by nice authorities...with their best interests at heart." Instead, such subjects "know that if they want power they must take it.... [S]ubjects who know that such takings are always illegitimate from the perspective of the order in place at the time.... subjects who experience the law...as a horizon of promise but also as an alien and impositional thing."¹¹³

Following Obama's re-election, such gothic voices have grown even louder. In December of 2012, DREAMers have moved their focus beyond the DREAM Act, calling for comprehensive immigration reform. In late November, more than six hundred representatives of America's two million undocumented youth gathered for the United We Dream 2012 National Congress in Kansas City, Mo. The congress also included a large national representation of UndocuQueer youth.¹¹⁴ On the last day of the conference, six immigrant parents joined a "coming out" ceremony in which they proclaimed their undocumented status and spoke in public for the first time.¹¹⁵

The ongoing struggle for comprehensive immigration reform is far from over. Whether Congress and the Obama administration will pass immigration reform anytime soon is far from certain.¹¹⁶ And even if legislation passes, the results are likely to be less just and fair than these communities deserve. Yet despite these setbacks, we have reason for cheer because unauthorized activists are, at last, a significant presence in the debate. As their voices proliferate on the Internet and in the streets, and in the halls of power, today's challenge lies in creating a civic culture capable of recognizing the power and value of such complex civic attachments.

Demanding membership in the context of desire and skepticism, such gothic subjects deepen our conceptions of citizenship, reminding us that democratic membership is a fraught and spirited enterprise. And as the struggle for a just form of political community continues, immigrants and

¹¹³ Honig 2003, 114-115.

¹¹⁴ As the UWD press release noted, "The immigrant youth movement has learned from past mistakes and will not leave LGBTQ families behind." Demanding an "inclusive pathway to citizenship," Dreamers are demanding the legalization of not just themselves but of their families and the larger communities they are a part of. As Dreamer Ulises Vasquez stated: "[o]ur families' dreams were to get a better future...but our future is with our families together. See Preston, "Young Immigrant Activists Cast a Wider Net," *New York Times*, December 2, 2012.

¹¹⁵ Preston 2012.

¹¹⁶ For more on the Congressional effort to overhaul immigration in 2013, see chapter 6 of *Reform Without Justice: Latino Migrant Politics and the Homeland Security State* by Alfonso Gonzales.

their allies will be drawing on both grassroots organizing and new digital technologies to cultivate queer democratic sensibilities that are unrepentant, audacious, and fearless.