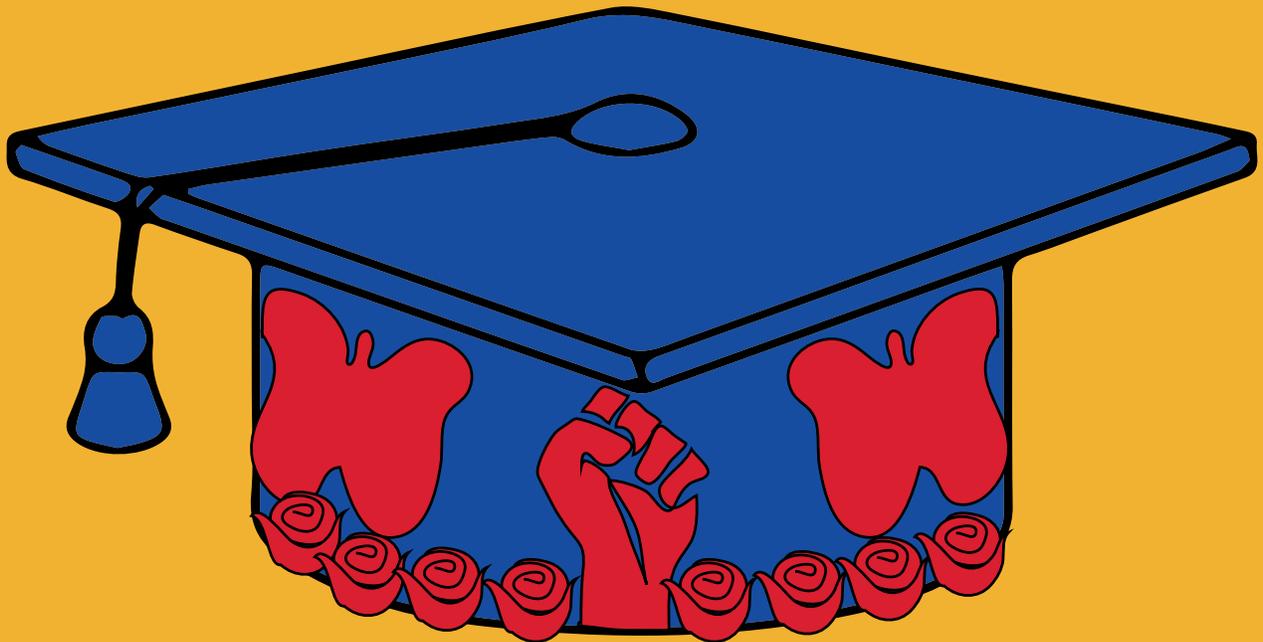


THE UNAFRAID



DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITY GUIDE

Directed by Anayansi Prado and Heather Courtney

2018 | USA | 87 min



THE UNAFRAID

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide is designed to help educators, organizers, and other screening hosts to enrich audiences' experience of *The Unafraid* through group discussion, facilitated activities, and resources for learning and action. The first two sections include information about the film, its subjects, and the issues surrounding U.S. immigration and the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. The third and fourth sections offer suggested discussion questions and activities for use before, during and after viewing the film. The last section includes a list of resources to support additional research, discussion, and action opportunities connected to the issues raised by the film.

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THE UNAFRAID

I. ABOUT THE UNAFRAID

THE FILM

The Unafraid is a feature length documentary that follows the personal lives of three DACAmented students in Georgia, a state that has banned undocumented students receiving Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) from attending their top five public universities and disqualifies them from receiving in-state tuition at any other public college. Shot over a period of four years, this film takes an intimate look at the lives of Alejandro, Silvia and Aldo and the obstacles they face in their home state when trying to go to college. This is also a story about family and community and the systemic challenges faced by the working poor and undocumented in the Deep South.

THE FILMMAKERS

Anayansi Prado (Co-Director/Producer/Cinematographer) is an award-winning documentary filmmaker and instructor who was born in Panama and moved to the United States as a teenager. She attended Boston University where she received a B.A. in Film. She directed and produced the award-winning documentaries *Maid in America* (2004, Independent Lens), *Children in No Man's Land* (2008) and *Paraiso for Sale* (2011) which were broadcast nationally on PBS. Anayansi is a Rockefeller Media Fellow and is a Creative Capital Artist and has received support for her work from The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, The Ford Foundation, Tribeca Film Institute, Chicken & Egg Pictures, The Fledgling Fund, Latino Public Broadcast, ITVS and others. Prado is a Film Expert for the American Film Showcase (2009-present) and works on a regular basis with the State Department's Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs to bring documentary filmmaking training to aspiring filmmakers in developing countries. Anayansi lives in Los Angeles, California.

Heather Courtney (Co-Director/Producer/Cinematographer) is a Guggenheim fellow and an Emmy-winning filmmaker. Her film *WHERE SOLDIERS COME FROM* won an Emmy, an Independent Spirit Award, and a SXSW Jury Award. The film received rave reviews from the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, and was broadcast nationally on the PBS program *POV*. It made several Top 10 films of 2011 lists, including *Salon's Best Non-fiction*, and was supported by many grants and fellowships including from ITVS, the Sundance Documentary Fund, the United States Artists Fellowship, and *POV/American Documentary*. Heather was also a fellow at the Sundance Edit and Story Lab. She has directed and produced several other documentary films including award-winners *LETTERS FROM THE OTHER SIDE* and *LOS TRABAJADORES/THE WORKERS*, which both focused on immigration issues, and were broadcast nationally on PBS. She has been funded by ITVS, the Sundance Documentary Fund, the Ford Foundation, the MacArthur Foundation, Latino Public Broadcasting, and the Austin Film Society, as well as a Fulbright Fellowship and an International Documentary Association award.

THE STUDENTS

Alejandro (aka Cheesecake), 17, has just graduated from high school when we meet him, and is working two jobs to help support his family. He wants to go to college and study sociology and art, but after graduation, Cheesecake has no affordable options for going to college in Georgia and spends the next year working full-time and applying to out-of-state schools that accept undocumented or DACAmented students.

Aldo, 18, grew up with Cheesecake in the same predominantly undocumented Latino trailer park outside of Athens. He came to the U.S. from Mexico with his parents when he was 4, and is an only child adored by his parents and his activist uncles. Eager to attend college after graduating from high school, Aldo wants to attend community college, but he would have to pay international tuition which is three times the in-state tuition other Georgia students are charged.

Silvia (Lili), 17, lives with her parents and extended family when we meet her, helping to take care of her younger sisters, and working at a fast food restaurant. She also makes time to be a leader in the undocumented student movement. She wants more than anything to stay in Georgia for college, and begins exploring how much it would cost to attend a nearby community college paying the international tuition DACA students have to pay in Georgia. Finding out how expensive it is, and that she would not qualify for any financial aid or tuition assistance, she throws herself into the fight for in-state tuition for DACA students in Georgia, until an unexpected opportunity comes up.



Alejandro, Silvia, and Aldo from *The Unafraid* at a recent film festival screening

II. IMMIGRATION AND DACA: DISPELLING MYTHS

While *The Unafraid* chronicles the lives of Aldo, Alejandro, and Silvia in the years following their high school graduation, the film is also a portrait of a multigenerational struggle for a better future. Through interviews with parents and grandparents, we learn about their journeys north, including the economic devastation that forced them to leave their homes and the sacrifices they made for their children along the way.

"My son was about a year old when NAFTA was passed. The economy crashed, and the country collapsed. Most small businesses like mine went totally bankrupt. So I was forced to immigrate. I would have stayed in Mexico if I'd had the resources to keep my shop open; My whole life was there. But now we have the chance to break the chain. I was able to become a technician. I want [my son] to do more than me." — Aldo's father

The Unafraid offers an intimate window into the lived experience of migration and what it means to reside in the U.S. without papers. But what about the facts? Today's media discourse is rife with falsehoods about the 45 million immigrants living in the U.S. and the policies affecting them. Below we supplement the narratives in the film with information dispelling common myths about immigration, undocumented immigrants, and DACA youth.

MYTH 1: "Immigration is on the rise like never before, our borders are being overrun."

REALITY: According to the 2017 American Community Survey (ACS), one in seven people living in the U.S. is an immigrant. At the turn of the 20th century, 14.8% of the U.S. population was foreign born. Today, 13.7% of the U.S. population is foreign born. While U.S. immigration has been increasing steadily since its record low in 1970, immigrants today represent a smaller portion of the overall population than at the height of European migration. Additionally, U.S. refugee admissions has fallen by close to 70% under the current presidential administration. DACA students are not only barred from colleges in some states, but also that they are charged international tuition in some states as well, which is at least 3 times what in-state tuition is and includes fees.

MYTH 2: "Undocumented immigrants don't pay taxes; they are a drain on the economy and on public services."

REALITY: According to the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, undocumented immigrants pay an estimated \$11.7 billion annually in taxes (a greater percentage of their income than the top 1%). Despite their exclusion from most government services and civil rights, undocumented immigrants pay sales taxes, income taxes, and property taxes. In 2010, for example, the Social Security Administration estimated that undocumented immigrants and their employers paid \$13 billion into social security. Of that, between \$6-7 billion was contributed directly by immigrants who will never be able to claim those benefits.

Policies such as DACA that authorize immigrants to work provide economic benefits not only to immigrants themselves, but to government revenues and society as a whole. An American Prospect 2018 survey of DACA recipients found that 62% purchased their first car after receiving DACA, 20% of respondents over the age of 25 reported purchasing their first home, and 54% moved into a job with higher pay. Still, like Aldo, Alejandro, and Silvia, DACA recipients in most states face barriers to higher education that severely limit the kinds of job opportunities they are able to access. While at least 20 states allow DACA youth who have graduated from their public schools to pay the same in-state tuition rates as their documented peers, DACA students remain ineligible for federal student loans. Some states, like Georgia and Alabama, have even gone as far as banning DACA students from applying to state universities. In some circumstances non-documented students are required to pay the international rate, which can be triple the cost of in-state tuition. Functionally, these policies shut out a path to college. Many DACA youth are sidelined into low-wage jobs because those are all they can get with a high school diploma.

MYTH 3: "Youth covered by DACA are foreigners and cultural outsiders."

REALITY: According to the Migration Policy Institute, approximately 1.3 million undocumented young people are eligible for DACA, while 670,000 of those are currently receiving it (down from 700,000 in August 2018). The DACA program was designed specifically to apply to young people who had spent the bulk of their lives in the U.S., requiring that applicants had arrived prior to June 2007. Most DACA recipients began grade school in the U.S., and many have no memory of their countries of origin. There are many stories of young people growing up never knowing they were undocumented and learning about their status only when they tried applying for a drivers' license or for college. This experience is echoed by Alejandro when he introduces himself to a student on a college tour:

"We're from Acapulco, Mexico. But I didn't get to grow up there. The slang has evolved, so if I went, I'd probably be lost. But here, I'm not accepted as American. So where does that put me?"

The DACA program itself was created by Executive Order under former President Barack Obama in 2012 as a stopgap measure when the U.S. House failed to bring the D.R.E.A.M. Act to a vote, following its passage by the Senate. While the D.R.E.A.M. Act would have opened pathways to permanent status for young people who know no other home country than the U.S., DACA offers only temporary reprieve from deportation with permission to work. It requires that those eligible reapply every two years for a fee of \$500, and provide extensive personal information, and submit fingerprints.

MYTH 4: "DACA is a back door to citizenship."

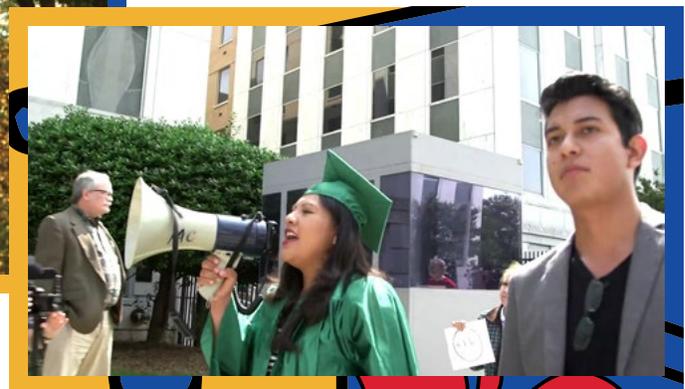
REALITY: Despite there being widespread public support for creating paths to citizenship for undocumented immigrants brought to the U.S. as children, DACA is simply permission to work, access to a drivers' license, and protection from deportation for a period of two years. While the Trump Administration issued an Executive Order to end DACA in September 2017, the federal courts have kept DACA in place despite several appeals, and the Supreme Court has agreed to hear the case in 2020. Although the program remains, enrollment has declined since September 2017, indicating that many of those eligible for DACA may be too fearful to apply or renew in the current political climate.



III. DISCUSSION PROMPTS

Post-screening discussions can be a powerful opportunity for audiences to reflect together on the issues raised by the film and come to a deeper understanding of how those issues play out in their communities. The following discussion questions can be tailored by local screening hosts to relate to their specific audiences and engagement goals. You are encouraged to use different ways of engaging the audience in conversation, including pair-shares, small groups, individual reflection, and full-group participation.

1. Early in the film, we see high school students chanting “Undocumented and unafraid” at a protest against their exclusion from Georgia’s top universities because of their citizenship status. But when Alejandro describes how he got involved in activism, he says, “Honestly, I was undocumented and very afraid at first!” What do you think gave Alejandro, Aldo, and Silvia the strength to take risks they did over the course of the film?
2. During the University of Georgia building occupation by undocumented students and their allies, we see a closed door with a sign that reads: “Desegregation in progress.” What are the parallels between the Civil Rights Movement that confronted Jim Crow laws and racial segregation throughout the South in the 1950s and ‘60s and today’s undocumented youth movement? What are the differences?
3. At one point in the film, Alejandro’s mother is pulled over while driving and arrested for not having a valid license. *The Unafraid* documents the myriad ways in which undocumented immigrants are excluded from basic rights and opportunities most people take for granted - from attending college, to commuting to work, to visiting to the doctor, to registering your child for school. Can you think of three experiences you’ve had in the past six months in which your citizenship status played a role?
4. When his father receives a diagnosis of kidney failure, Aldo calls a California Health Department information line because, in the state of California, undocumented immigrants are eligible for Medicare. What do you know about the policies in your city and state that relate to undocumented immigrants? What rights, services, and opportunities do they have access to? Which are they denied?
5. At one point in the film, Aldo’s uncle says that he and his family members came seeking the American dream but instead found “an American nightmare.” Based on the film and on your own knowledge and experience of immigration, what do you think is it like to live in the U.S. without papers? Aldo’s uncle also mentions that poor Americans would agree with him because they are also living a nightmare. What do you think he meant by this?
6. The film takes place primarily in 2014, 2015, and 2016, before the presidential election of Donald Trump. Since then, the new administration’s push for a multibillion dollar “border wall” led the longest government shutdown in U.S. history, while the separation of families at the border and the overcrowded, unsafe conditions in detention facilities have drawn increasing scrutiny from both advocates and the courts. How do you think these policies and the public debate surrounding immigration have affected undocumented immigrants currently living in the U.S.?



IV. POST-SCREENING ACTIVITY

In addition to discussions, engaging audiences in facilitated activities can further deepen the impact of screening events. The following activity can be used with groups of any age or size.

ACTIVITY: *MY FAMILY, OUR MIGRATION STORIES*

- Explain to the audience that you'll be spending the next 15-20 minutes reflecting on and sharing the migration stories we have all brought into the room through our family histories. Remind them that migration can mean moving across the world, or it can mean moving from one part of the country to another. Introduce the activity with the following icebreaker:
 - How many people in the room have lived in more than one state? Raise your hand.
 - Raise your hand if you have lived in more than one country?
 - Raise your hand if who have a parent who was born in a different country from you?
 - Raise your hand if you have a grandparent or great grandparent whose children were born in a different country from them?
 - Raise your hand if your extended family includes citizens of more than one country or nation?
 - Raise your hand if there are gaps in the information you have about your family's migration stories because you ancestors were forced to leave against their will?

Acknowledge that migration stories may include the joys of new opportunities, but often involve experiences of struggle and hardship and may involve real traumas.

- Ask attendees to take a minute for individual reflection and think 3-4 generations back in their family (or more if they're able). What have they heard about times when their ancestors left the communities in which they lived? What caused them to leave? How were they received in the new places they arrived? What opportunities were open to them there, and what barriers did they face?
 - *While you're introducing the activity and giving attendees time to reflect, pass out the family tree worksheet to all attendees. Appendix A.*
- Ask audience members to spend 3-4 minutes filling out the family tree worksheet, listing all of the important places - whether cities, states, countries, territories, or continents, that their family members moved to and from. After 3.5 minutes are up, announce they have one more minute to add information to the worksheets.
- Ask audience members to find two people near them who they did not come in with, and introduce themselves.
- In groups of three over the next 10 minutes, have audience members reflect on the activity. Each person should have time to share one story they know about in which their family members took risks in the course of moving from one place to another. What risk did they take, and what were they hoping to gain? What barriers did they face, whether physical, economic, social, or political? What sources of support did they or might they have drawn on in order to make it through this experience? Let participants know when 5 minutes have passed, and make sure each group member has a chance to share.
- At the end of 10 minutes, reconvene in the big group.
- Ask for 2-3 volunteers to share something that surprised them or moved them about the stories they heard in their small groups. In particular, did these conversations offer any new insights into the experience of immigrants - and especially undocumented immigrants — in the U.S. today?

V. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

ORGANIZATIONS SUPPORTING UNDOCUMENTED AND “DACAMENTED” STUDENTS

■ **UNITED WE DREAM**

The largest immigrant youth-led network working on a national level for undocumented students rights.

■ **FREEDOM UNIVERSITY**

Based in Atlanta, Georgia, their mission is to empower undocumented youth and fulfill their human right to education.

■ **U-LEAD**

Based in Athens, Georgia, their mission is to provide tools, resources, and a safe and nurturing environment for undocumented students.

■ **THE ESPERANZA EDUCATION FUND**

A scholarship fund for students to help them achieve their dreams through higher education regardless of their national origin, ethnicity, or immigration status.

■ **THEDREAM.US**

Helps highly motivated DREAMers graduate from college with career-ready degrees by providing scholarships.

■ **VOTO LATINO**

A civic media organization that seeks to transform America by recognizing Latinos’ innate leadership.

■ **CHIRLA**

LA-based nonprofit whose mission is to achieve a just society fully inclusive of immigrants.

■ **DEFINE AMERICAN**

Co-founded by journalist Jose Antonio Vargas, a media and educational nonprofit with college chapters focused on humanizing the national conversation on immigration, citizenship, and identity.

■ **SOUTHERN POVERTY LAW CENTER**

This center has a project to fund lawyers in the south to help DACA recipients and undocumented people.

DATA SOURCES, BOOKS, ARTICLES, AND GUIDES

■ Jose Antonio Vargas, *Dear America: Notes of an Undocumented Citizen*, New York: Harper Collins, 2018.

■ “Access to Drivers Licenses Toolkit” from National Immigration Law Center
<https://www.nilc.org/issues/drivers-licenses/dlaccess toolkit2/>

■ Migration Policy Institute, “Immigration Data Matters” Guide 2018 - an annotated compilation of more than 220 government and academic sources of information about U.S. immigration
<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/immigration-data-matters>

■ Migration Policy Institute, “DACA Data Hub”
<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/deferred-action-childhood-arrivals-daca-profiles>

■ U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service statistics on DACA recipients by state, country of origin, and metropolitan region, April 2019.
https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/USCIS/Resources/Reports%20and%20Studies/Immigration%20Forms%20Data/All%20Form%20Types/DACA/Approximate_Active_DACA_Recipients_Demographics_-_Apr_30_2019.pdf

■ Pew Research Center, “Shifting Views on Legal Immigration”
<https://www.people-press.org/2018/06/28/shifting-public-views-on-legal-immigration-into-the-u-s/>

■ Michael D. Shear and Adam Liptak, “It’s Now the Supreme Court’s Turn to Try to Resolve the Fate of the Dreamers,” *The New York Times*, June 28, 2019.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/28/us/politics/supreme-court-daca-dreamers.html>

■ “New York State Senate Passes Drivers License Access and Privacy Act (Green Light NY)”, June 17, 2019
<https://www.nysenate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/senate-passes-drivers-license-access-and-privacy-act-green-light-ny>

■ Center for American Progress, “Amid Legal and Political Uncertainty, DACA Remains As Important As Ever,” August 15, 2018.
<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/immigration/news/2018/08/15/454731/amid-legal-political-uncertainty-daca-remains-important-ever/>