

Gustavo Madrigal-Piña, “Undocumented and Unafraid” (August 22, 2011)⁵

Hello everyone. My name is Gustavo. I am undocumented and I am unafraid.

I was brought here to this country at the age of nine by my parents. Ever since, many people have asked me what brought my family to this country. The answer has always been simple and always been the same: poverty.

Poverty meaning an uncertain one to two meals a day, if there were ever any second meals.

Poverty meaning walking forty-five minutes downhill to go to school and an hour and half back uphill to go back home because we were too poor to afford the bus fare.

Poverty meaning that my parents had to make a choice. A life-or-death choice between living in the same conditions that you'd been living in—in poverty—or [to] go out and search for a better life. And I'm eternally grateful to my parents for the choice they made.

I said life-or-death choice because our journey to the [United] States brought us a couple of times close to death. I remember the second time of walking through the desert, my mom collapsed from the heat. Now, we were very lucky to have such generous people traveling with us who gave up their water so that my mom could drink it, get back up, and keep walking. I'm eternally grateful to them for that, even though that meant they had to go without water.

At the end of our journey, we were kidnapped by a gang. Me and my sister, we were nine and eight years old, respectively, at that time. They didn't care. That didn't matter to them. They stripped all of us of our clothes, our money, and our dignity.

Luckily we were let go and we eventually made it to Griffin, Georgia, which would become my family's home for the next ten years.

I don't blame my parents for the situation that I'm in. I am grateful to them. I realize that they made the responsible and courageous choices that they had to make, that any parent in that situation, in those shoes, would have made for their kids. For my mom and dad, *muchas gracias y los quiero mucho por todo lo que han hecho por mí.*

Why am I sharing this with you today? It's not to gain your sympathy but to obtain your support. To show you, but not only you—to show sympathetic and opposing politicians, and everyone—that I am not an “illegal alien,” that I am indeed a human being, a human being with rights.

I would show everyone that I'm not just a number, that I'm not part of a quota that needs to be met by President Obama every year ... who, as sympathetic as he may be, is no better than Nathan Deal, or Russell Pierce, or Matt Ramsey, with his program “Secure Communities.”

In these troubled economic times, the State of Georgia has decided to make me and my fellow undocumented brothers and sisters an enemy and a scapegoat. How did they

do this? First they banned us from the top five universities here in the State of Georgia, no matter how qualified we are to attend those institutions. And then they criminalized our very own existence and livelihood through HB 87. Well, I'm here to tell the State of Georgia that I'm not going down without a fight, that I'm here to fight for my brothers and sisters.

I'm here to tell the State of Georgia that I refuse to become a second-class citizen or anything below that. I want to tell the State of Georgia that I refuse to let anyone—anyone—become a second-class citizen or anything below that.

I will put up resistance as long as there is blood pumping through my veins.

And I'm also here to ask you to join me and my undocumented brothers and sisters in the fight of our lives. We need to fight back. We need to organize through the struggles that we all share as part of the working class. And together we can beat HB 87, overturn the ban, and win social and educational equality for all.

I would like to wrap this up with a quote from one of my favorite people—you guys might know him—Malcolm X. I speak from a personal standpoint, but I'm pretty sure that I also speak for many of my undocumented brothers and sisters. To the State of Georgia, and I quote, "We declare our right on this earth to be a human being, to be respected as a human being, to be given the rights of a human being in this society, on this earth, in this day, which we intend to bring into existence by any means necessary."

My name is Gustavo Madrigal. I am undocumented, unafraid, and unashamed.

Thank you very much.



Barack Obama ran for president in 2008 with promises to reform U.S. immigration law. By the middle of his second term, he had deported more than two million undocumented people, more than any president in U.S. history. Roberto Meneses Marquez is the president of Day Laborers United (Jornaleros Unidos), a group working for the rights of workers in the precarious day labor industry, many of them undocumented.

Roberto Meneses Marquez, "A Day Laborer" (April 30, 2013)⁶

I am an undocumented day laborer in Queens who has worked in this country for almost twenty years. I do hard, dangerous jobs on construction sites such as demolition or carrying out the trash, when I can get any work at all. I have known many men who have been killed in workplace accidents or who have become gravely ill from breathing in dust due to a lack of adequate protective equipment.