

Young Voices on Social Class in America: A Student Essay Pod

Edited by Sara Appel, Lewis and Clark College

Editor's Introduction

Though I need to begin this introduction by emphasizing that being an Adjunct Professor is *never* an ideal, or even adequate, situation from which to perform academic labor, I have nevertheless had an opportunity to do something rare in that capacity: I've gotten to teach a self-designed research seminar on the subject at the center of my scholarly wheelhouse, 'Social Class in America.' For three spring semesters now, my employment in the CORE freshman humanities program at Lewis and Clark—a private liberal arts college nestled in the Portland, Oregon woodlands—has allowed me to introduce *class* as a variable in conversations about race, gender, sexuality, immigration, and related intersectional concepts.

Furthermore, though the vast majority of Lewis and Clark students are what I'd describe as privileged yet politically conscious, my 'Social Class in America' sections have functioned as magnets for working-class, poor, and first-generation students. In some respects, this is unsurprising; when signing up for the required CORE class, students list their top three choices, so an element of self-selection is clearly at play. Also unsurprisingly, the more class-marginalized students in my sections tend to be marginalized, in the U.S., in other ways: they are immigrants, or queer, or Latinx, or are moving to the 'big city' from rural areas of the country. These intersections, I've found, have played out in not only the richness of the knowledge that these students bring to our classroom conversations—their own expertise about 'how class works' in America, and often abroad—but in the quality of the research and writing I've seen them produce.

This past semester, I therefore decided that in order to further incentivize my 'Social Class in America' students to do their best work, I would do my best to offer an opportunity for several of them to publish their research papers. *The Journal of Working-Class Studies* came to our rescue, graciously allowing me to feature six fine papers—all of them written by second-semester freshmen—in what I'm calling a student essay 'pod.' I used two basic criteria when selecting these essays: 1), I wanted the pod to feature work that examined the place of class within a variety of topics of real urgency in our contemporary world—in the essays that follow, you'll see class discussed as it relates to the environment, immigrant labor and education, sex work, queer history, and housing. And 2), it was important to me that at least half of the essays I chose be written by students who self-identify as from working-class, poor, or first-generation college student backgrounds. Such students are not only underrepresented at schools like Lewis and Clark, but are generally given fewer opportunities than more class privileged students to publish, especially early in their academic careers—so I wanted to do what I could to help shrink that opportunity gap. Each of the six essays featured here also ends with a brief biographical statement, so you can get to know the writers a bit better.

Finally, I want to emphasize that the essays you're about to read, while being good *student* writing, also serve as a barometer of what the youth of today—the leaders, laborers, maybe even revolutionaries of tomorrow—are thinking about, as far as how class factors into their concern for our collective future. You'll notice some unifying threads running throughout this work. The role of borders, boundaries, and the (de)legitimizing force of the law—how law and ideology have functioned to enforce who does and doesn't belong, particularly within the United States—is one such thread. We'll let you untangle the rest.

Mexican Immigrants: The Hidden Labor Community

By Ariely Mejia

*'How do you guys do it?
Como no le entiendo oiga
Ay, Comos...ustedes hacen...para venir...to the United States?
Chambeandole oiga como siempre le hemos hecho en el rancho.'*
—From the Mexican corrido 'Soy De Rancho'¹

My name is Ariely Mejia, and I grew up on the southside of Texas in a suburb famously known as Little Mexico. It's an apartment-style neighborhood with different complexes, each having its pros and lots of cons. *Paleteros*² go in and out of apartment blocks, place orders of *popusas* or *tamales* to the old lady on the first floor. Groups of men patiently wait in front of the local convenience store for their 'boss' to take them to work. This is a typical day scene. Immigrant workers wait in front of run-down businesses every day at five in the morning to get to *chambeando* (non-stop heavy work).

Corridos, such as the one above, are songs that express only a fraction of the reality Mexican immigrants face when crossing the border and adjusting to U.S. society. Such hardships include: leaving family and home behind, the dangerous physical crossing to the U.S., constant racial attacks from white people, and the difficult task of finding work. Seeking a job in the U.S., for a Mexican immigrant, is nearly impossible to do legally. The major barrier of not having citizenship in the U.S. causes this community to come up with non-mainstream work that can be done without legal documentation. The way immigrants look for work and help each other succeed in America has become an unofficial system. To explore how this system operates, this essay will provide a quick recap of the history of Mexican labor in the U.S.; discuss differences between work opportunities in Mexico and the U.S.; and give an overview of the diverse jobs that Mexican-American immigrants find themselves performing. While examining these topics, I will share personal stories from Mexican immigrants ranging from ages 39-50 years old. These narratives don't represent every Mexican immigrant's experience in the U.S., however; countless stories are not recorded, but should not be left unnoticed. To protect the safety of those I know, names have been changed, with the exception of narratives featured in other publications.

¹ 'How do you guys do it?/ What? I don't understand what you are saying. / Ah, how... do you guys... do it to come... to the United States?/ Working hard you know, how we've always done it back in the ranch.'

² Ice cream vendor

'Aquí los Americanos nomas les importa una cosa: el dinero. Es lo que siempre piensan en, no les importa a quien están lastimando, solo que no les vaya a afectar sus bolsillos.'

—Christina Perez, 49 years old, Mexican immigrant in Texas³

Before the word 'immigrant' was created and borders imposed on Mexico, Mexicans were already on 'American' land. From 1846-1848, Mexico lost half of its land in the Mexican-American War; however, there were still a large number of native Mexicans who resided on that stolen land. These Mexicans were labeled 'savages' by 'the Gringo[s], [who were] locked into the fiction of white superiority [and] seized political power, stripping Indians and Mexicans of their land while their feet were still rooted in it' (Anzaldúa 2012 p. 7). Furthermore, Mexicans weren't able to live peacefully on their small amount of owned land; large agribusinesses used their power and influence to steal it through countless of abusive acts, causing U.S.-based Mexicans to migrate to what is now 'real' Mexico (Anzaldúa 2012 p. 9). In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, author Gloria Anzaldúa's mother remembers an unjust event that ruthless *gabachos*⁴ inflicted on Anzaldúa's grandmother. Following a long drought that hit Texas in the early 1930's, 'A smart *gabacho* lawyer took the land away *mamá* hadn't paid taxes...she didn't know how to ask for time to raise the money,' Anzaldúa paraphrases (2012 p. 8). Even after such ravages, businessmen still used Mexicans for cheap labor. In the late nineteenth century, the President of Mexico, Porfirio Díaz, established an open-door policy which allowed unrestricted foreign capital investment in Mexico. This policy ensured the U.S. cheap labor and imports of raw materials (Chaichian 2014 p. 180), benefitting Mexico's foreign investors rather than the *campesinos*, or poor residents of Mexico.

In 1942, the *Bracero* Program, an agreement to allow Mexicans to work in the U.S. for a period of time in agricultural labor, resulted in one of the largest official surges of Mexican immigration to the U.S. (Portes & Bach 1985 p. 61). The wages paid through the *Bracero* Program were much higher for the same work than in Mexico, which ultimately led to more migration to the U.S. In 1965, a similar open policy allowed powerful Mexican landowners and colonizing American companies to create factories along the Mexico-U.S. border. Under this policy, the dependency Mexico had, and still has, on the U.S. and the devaluation of the *peso* overtime caused *la crisis*, where Mexico was unable to repay its debts following large oil price shocks that occurred during the 1970s (Anzaldúa 2012 p. 10). In response, the U.S. assisted Mexico with loans, but matters only worsened in August 1982 when the Mexican Finance Minister informed the U.S. and the IMF that Mexico was unable to pay its debts (Romero & Sims 2014 p. 6). As a result, Mexico experienced a high unemployment rate, with many Mexicans turning to *El Norte* for work. 'The majority of [Mexican] immigrants [in the U.S.] came from rural, lower class backgrounds,' writes historian Mohammad Chaichian, as they were and are seeking better lives (2014 p. 181). Large migration waves surfaced due to the numerous barriers Mexicans faced while seeking a stable life in Mexico, where the effects of colonialism by the U.S. disrupted the entire economic system.

'La gente, con la que yo trabaje, por ser que tenían más dinero que podían pagar

³ *'Here in this land the Americans only care about one thing: the money. It's what they are always thinking about, they do not care who they are hurting in the process, only if it doesn't affect their wallets.'*

⁴ Chicano pejorative term to describe an English-speaking, non-Hispanic person

alguien que les limpiara, era gente muy grosera y abusaban mucho de uno. Y en cambio aquí, hay algunos que sí son muy exigentes, pero pues lo sentí mas aya en Mexico que aqui. Y que hay gente grosera, donde quiera hay gente grosera.'

—Juana, 45, Mexican immigrant in Portland, OR⁵

Mexican immigrants have worked a diverse range of jobs, in the U.S. as well as in Mexico. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2018 ‘nearly half (47.7 percent) of the foreign-born labor force was Hispanic’ (BLS 2018 p. 2). These occupations have typically included service work such as lawn care, plumbing, janitorial maintenance, and house cleaning. However, there are significant differences between labor in Mexico and the U.S. Two women I interviewed commented on the contrasts. Both Juana and Christina, Mexican immigrants to Oregon and Texas, have worked in Mexico as servants or *muchachas*⁶. Upon arriving to the U.S., they found work cleaning houses. They commented on the distinctions between house cleaning in the two countries. A common contrast they mentioned was that in Mexico, they had to commit themselves to working for only one household; as is customary in Mexico, they couldn’t work for any other family. Not only did they clean the home, but they also cooked the meals and took care of the children. Christina expresses how she much prefers working in the U.S. ‘In Mexico I did so much work for such a small price. But in the North, I am able to work more than just one house and it’s less work,’ she said. Juana also mentions the poor treatment she experienced in Mexico working as a *sirvienta*, treatment emphasized by the above quote. Throughout the interview, she kept referring back to how rude her bosses were and how they only acted as superior because they had money, *no eran pobres*.⁷ Though, as she emphasizes, ‘wherever you go, there will always be rude people’ and poor treatment by rich clients, the U.S. included.

‘Nosotros les sembramos el árbol y ellos se comen la fruta...

Tenemos mas trucos que la policía secreta

Metimos la casa completa en una maleta

Con un pico, una pala

Y un rastrillo

Te construimos un castillo’

—From *The Hamilton Remix*, ‘Immigrants (We Get The Job Done)’⁸

During the late twentieth century, as Mexicans began to hear dreamlike anecdotes of *El Norte* and saw relatives and friends come back with high-class goods and a significant amount of money, a new wave of Mexicans migrated to the U.S. Back in my neighborhood, those who are a part of this wave are now 40 and above. In ‘Little Mexico’ there seems to be a community within the neighborhood that helps each other in finding employment. The store where men wait for their *jefe*⁹ to go to work is in this community. Individuals arriving to the U.S that already have family residing here, who are also of illegal status, can access work through these networks. Family

⁵ ‘The people that I worked for as a maid in Mexico were rude, abusive, and demanding. Here in the U.S. I also work as a maid, and have noticed that some people are very demanding, but I felt it more in Mexico than here (the U.S.). But wherever you go there will always be rude people.’

⁶ Girls (term used to describe these cleaning ladies, mostly used in Mexico)

⁷ They were not poor

⁸ ‘We plant the tree and they reap the fruit / We have more tricks than the secret police ... We packed our entire house in one suitcase / With a pick, a shovel / And a rake / We built you a castle’

⁹ Boss

members are able to recommend the ‘newbie’ to works that they know of by contacting other Mexican immigrants who are looking for *chambelanes*.¹⁰ As writer Maria Ana Corona states, ‘That’s how it works; a business that’s all from mouth to mouth. There’s no organization at all’ (1993 p. 15). An example of this can be seen with Francisco Salazar, a 45-year old Mexican immigrant who now resides in Portland, Oregon. Francisco arrived in the U.S in 1995 when he was 22. One of his aunts had already settled in the U.S., and had learned the ropes of how this unestablished labor system works. She helped Francisco find work at a restaurant through connections she had previously made with other Mexican immigrant employees who have worked or are still working there. This act of helping each other find work is common within the Mexican immigrant community. They wish to see each other succeed, with a familiar hope and moral obligation.

Francisco worked at the restaurant for 8 years. He started off washing dishes, but was then promoted to cook, which slightly increased his pay. After this job, Francisco was able to find work as a *yardero*¹¹ with the help of family recommendations; for a night job, he worked as a janitor through the same method of searching. Interestingly, he worked under white American bosses in his work as a *yardero*. In Texas, most bosses of Mexican immigrants in the landscaping business are also fellow Mexicans. In fact, ‘Immigrant entrepreneurs typically tend to run very small businesses, often relying on self-employment and the use of unpaid family labor’ (Ramirez 2011 p. 14). The only landscaping businesses owned by white Americans are big companies with a large number of employees. These American bosses use Mexican immigrant workers as cheap labor. According to a 2008 survey, ‘26% of [U.S.] workers reported experiencing a minimum wage violation, but among immigrants the figure was 31%... and among those without documents the figure was 37%’ (Gentsch & Massey, Scared p. 5). *Yarderos* who work for white Americans likely fall into this category of wage violation.

Mexican immigrants to the U.S. also often run self-owned businesses. As economist Kaivan Munshi points out, considering that most relationships among Mexican immigrants ‘are based on kinship, friendship, and in particular, *paisanaje* (belonging to a common origin-community)... ties among *paisanos* actually appear to strengthen once they arrive in the United States, and this sociological change is reinforced by the emergence of community-based institutions’ (2003 p. 551). *Paisanos* therefore rely on each other to not only find employment, but to become entrepreneurs as well. These self-made businesses operate best within a Hispanic populated *barrio*,¹² rather than in the primarily white suburbs. Business owners profit from the marketing of Mexican culture, such as the sale of clothing, food, homemade *barro artesanias*,¹³ and even cooking supplies. In fact, ‘between 1990 and 2012, the number of Hispanic immigrant entrepreneurs more than quadrupled, going from 321,000 to 1.4 million’ (Better Business 2014 p. 2). They have used the market to establish and forge their own culture within these economic spaces.

Such entrepreneurial labor includes store-like convenient shops—in apartment complexes or also scattered around the community—*tamales*/other authentic dishes sold in these neighborhoods, and

¹⁰ Hard workers

¹¹ Individual who works in lawn maintenance

¹² Neighborhood

¹³ Clay crafts

the populous mixture of small merchants in *pulgas*.¹⁴ Ministore-like fronts are commonly seen in my neighborhood, located in the living room of an apartment. There are numerous shops in these Hispanic home districts that, as sociologist Nestor Rodriguez states in a *Houston Chronicle* article, '[are something] done informally to raise some cash... one could call it a parallel economy' (Moreno 2005 p.10). Due to the status of Mexican immigrants as non-citizens, these businesses are not legally licensed. However, that doesn't stop them, since this type of work is one of the very limited options available. Another method this community uses to earn money is through the labor of cooking authentic Mexican dishes to be sold to other Hispanics. Letty, a 40-year old Mexican immigrant to 'Little Mexico,' sells *tamales*, *gorditas*, and *tortas*, her specialties. She shares that throughout the years, she has slowly developed her small business; 'It took a while for people to find out I was selling food. But now that everybody knows, everybody wants to buy my food.' Her statement is a clear indicator of this community relying on each other in order to succeed; the individuals in this district are the ones who buy these cultural reminiscences of Mexico. It is a business from 'mouth-to-mouth' as Letty was not able to sell much until word began to spread.

Additionally, the local *pulgas* play a huge role in fostering the entrepreneurial attitude within Mexican immigrant society. I grew up going to these markets almost every weekend. There are a variety of *pulgas*; some are more mixed-race dynamic markets, and others are solely Hispanic. The *mercados*¹⁵ that are primarily Mexican-immigrant populated emit that authentic Mexico vibe, with stands for homemade Mexican cuisines, regional *banda* music playing, and even just random products they decide to sell for extra cash. These *mercados* are usually DIY stands that are made out of wood with makeshift kitchens for food vendors to utilize (Fouts 2017). As they are confronted by numerous barriers in the workforce, such entrepreneurial ideas are the result of limitations that Mexican-immigrant workers must maneuver around.

*'Y aunque me miren pa' abajo
La cara levanto
Empinándome un bote
Como quiera soy amigo
Y también mexicano
Mexicano Hasta El Tope'*

*—From 'Corrido De Juanito'*¹⁶

Growing up in this community, then suddenly moving to a primarily white educational institution, made me realize many things. I began to understand that my community is not considered important in U.S. society. Mexican immigrants were here long before this land was even considered 'America.' We have been discriminated against, violated, and exploited by the white Americans who use our labor for capitalist benefit. As this great population of Mexican-immigrant workers remain 'hidden,' the word 'immigrant' continues to be further associated with the Southern border in the eyes of white Americans. This only dehumanizes the community, due to the idea that we must be separated from the U.S. through the use of a border. I believe that more labor organizations should be created and operated by the Mexican-immigrant community.

¹⁴ Flea markets

¹⁵ Markets

¹⁶ 'And even if they look down on me / I keep my head up / Drinking a bottle.../ As I am, I'm a friend / And also Mexican, / Mexican until the end.'

Through this, Mexican-immigrant workers could have a platform to fight for their rights. Whether one chooses to acknowledge our existence or not, we are here, we are working, and we're tired of being ignored.

Ariely Mejia grew up in Houston, Texas, within a working-class family. She's a first-generation college student and an undeclared major¹⁷. 'As I've finished my first year of college in a primarily white institution with the majority of students being from upper-class backgrounds, I have realized that I want my community to be heard loud and clear,' she shares. 'They continue to be oppressed not only through social class, but through their racial background. Although I'm still figuring out what I will be doing after college, I hope to find a career that will allow me to help my community by fighting for their rights in the U.S.'

Putting People Out to Pasture: Social Class in the American HIV/AIDS Epidemic, 1981 – Present

By Jensen Kraus

'The question is what does a decent society do with people who hurt themselves because they're human; who smoke too much, who eat too much, who drive carelessly, who don't have safe sex? I think the answer is that a decent society does not put people out to pasture and let them die because they've done a human thing.'

-Bob Rafsky, 1946-1993

As of 2016, around 675,000 people have died of AIDS-related causes in the United States. This does not take into account the countless lives lost, who were undiagnosed either due to lack of information or stigma. It is estimated that around 1.2 million people in the US currently live with AIDS or HIV, with as many as 40,000 new infections each year. AIDS, previously considered to be a death sentence, is now preventable and treatable. In 1996, the introduction of the antiretroviral 'drug cocktail' went on to save countless lives. It marked the moment when an HIV diagnosis no longer signified a life cut short. However, this very real epidemic still prevails in many areas of the United States.

Social class has touched every aspect of the American AIDS epidemic, both in the pre-1996 era and in the modern struggle. The epidemic raises an important question: how does a modern country handle a medical crisis that disproportionately affects the marginalized? In addition to the social and political implications of medical epidemics, these crises carry economic ramifications as marginalized individuals are affected by the pricing of medicine, access to resources, and the complexity of activism. It is impossible to understand the impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic without taking in account the economic standing of those involved.

1981 – 1996

¹⁷ In the US higher education system, some institutions allow students to begin their college degree without declaring their area of study (their 'major').

During the 80s, AIDS and HIV was not marked as a disease of the lower class; instead the stigmatization was focused on gay and bisexual men. Calling the epidemic a ‘gay plague’, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) furthered the stigmatization by labelling it ‘Gay-Related Immune Deficiency.’ In 1982, the CDC discovered that a portion of their patients were not gay or bisexual. This revelation led to the name to be changed to Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). Later, rates of infection rose in intravenous drug users and Haitian immigrants more quickly than the rest of the population. These groups shared similarities in that they stayed within their social circles and to some extent were seen as ‘dirty’ by the rest of the population. In the face of a medical epidemic, those infected are burdened with even more stigma and economic suffering. The circumstances surrounding AIDS and HIV in the early years made it so that those who once had economic stability lost their wealth at alarming rates.

During the epidemic, some employers refused to hire people who tested HIV positive, or even hire anyone who presented as one of the identified at-risk groups. Other employers fired those who came out as HIV positive or moved them to an isolated work environment (Leonard 1985). Michael Callen, a prominent AIDS activist and legal secretary in the early 80’s, was ‘placed on medical leave of absence, without pay’ (France 2016 p. 110). Callen’s co-workers had learned of his condition through *New York* magazine and expressed fear over working alongside someone with HIV. He was not even allowed to return to his desk to gather his things. By 1984, there was legal standing to object to the firing of People with AIDS (PWA’s) as AIDS and HIV fell under the umbrella term ‘handicap.’ However, not all PWA’s had the funds, resources, and time that it could take to fight employment discrimination. Due to the fast-acting nature of many opportunistic infections that attacked the weakened immune system, some PWA’s, like John Chadbourne, died before their civil rights cases could be completed (Barrios 1987). In 1994, one study featured 305 patients who had been diagnosed with AIDS or HIV, 76% of whom were employed at the time of their diagnosis. They found that 23% of their employed sample left or lost their jobs in under a month. After 16 months, 53% of their sample were employed, with about one third of that number on disability leave, only 36% of their sample were still active in the workforce. Those who were white, college educated, had never used IV drugs, and had jobs that required less physical effort were more likely to stay employed for longer. The effect of a lost job on a person’s income was described as ‘immediate and severe,’ with an income being reduced to one fourth of what it was at the time of employment (Massagli 1994 p. 6).

Lack of employment, whether voluntary or involuntary, severely impacted the lives of PWA’s, as treatment costs soared to tens of thousands of dollars. With loss of employment, many also lost access to health insurance. In 1987, AZT, the only drug approved to treat AIDS at the time, was the most expensive prescription drug ever introduced. The drug cost \$8,000 to \$10,000 a year, while those in the early stages of HIV could take a smaller dose that cost \$3,500 to \$4,000 a year (Zonona 1989). These prices do not include the cost of hospital visits, routine check-ups, in-home care, and other treatments needed to combat opportunistic infections and side effects. Assuming an average life expectancy of one to two years after diagnosis, the total medical cost of treating HIV/AIDS was estimated to be around \$60,000 to \$90,000 dollars per person (Scitovsky 1988).

Only around 20% of PWA’s had private health insurance during this period (Diaz 1994). For those on public insurance, the government usually provided either SSD (Social Security Disability Insurance) or SSI (Supplemental Security Income). SSD was geared towards those who were

disabled and had been unemployed for at least five months, but whose income was too high to qualify for other social services. SSD served PWA's very poorly due to the two-year waiting period for the implementation of Medicare coverage, making it out of the question because of their short life expectancy. SSI was directed toward those who had lost their money due to unemployment or who were already low-income. This program guaranteed the right to Medicaid coverage and paid a low monthly stipend, some of which had to go to paying for home care bills or medical expenses (Niehaus 1990). For some, neither of these programs were available. David France recalls consoling a neighbor with HIV, who was kicked out of his apartment due to his HIV status, and the hospitals wouldn't take him. 'They told me to go home to Puerto Rico to die. But how?' his neighbor lamented (France 2016 p. 217). Without money or resources, there were few options for PWA's who had nowhere to turn.

These programs also often controlled the lives of PWA's. If their income changed or if they became employed, they risked losing public insurance. The bureaucratic nature of these programs also hurt struggling PWA's immensely, requiring hours of paperwork. For those who may not have been able to communicate regularly with their doctor or case worker, as is the case of many PWA's in rural low-income settings, this process could be even more challenging. Months could be the difference between life and death; many died waiting for their disability payments. Others, like Brian Gougeon, made it through the process of paying for their medication, but would receive their treatment too late; 'Delayed by shortages and high demand, [his AZT] arrived almost two weeks late. By then he was in no condition to take it, having slipped into a coma from which he never returned' (France 2016 p. 277). While these government programs had the intention of helping PWA's with medical costs, they had multiple shortcomings, leaving PWA's economically burdened.

Rising medical prices and gaps in government aide meant that many PWA's had little option but to create their own way of treating their illness. Known as 'buyers clubs,' groups of AIDS activists took advantage of the FDA loophole that allowed patients to import drugs approved abroad, creating an underground drug market. Many of their patients were those who could not afford AZT any other way. During at least one protest, buyers clubs flaunted their ability to treat, or at least attempt to treat, PWA's by assembling makeshift drug stands in the crowd outside the FDA. They chanted, 'Get your dextran sulfate here, you can't get it inside!', selling the drug for a low price of three dollars for ten pills (How to Survive a Plague 2012). Aerosol pentamine, used to prevent PCP (an often deadly opportunistic infection), was sold on market for \$125 to \$175 per dose, but buyers clubs sold it for \$40 dollars a dose, making it more available to those who previously could not afford it (Levin & Sanger 2000). This not only showed the desperation for useful, cheap drugs that were needed during this time, but also the ability for communities to come together to provide accessible resources when those in power weren't providing.

Buyers clubs weren't the only form of AIDS activism present during these years. Founded by playwright Larry Kramer in 1987, the most prominent of these groups, ACT UP, used direct action to attempt to change policies, legislation, and AIDS research agendas. In some regards they were very successful, managing to lower the price of AZT by about 20% after an array of protests. During one of the last, Peter Staley, a former Wall Street banker, and four other men chained themselves to the balcony of the New York Stock Exchange, blasted marine foghorns, and threw fake money onto the ground printed with the phrase: 'We die while you make money. Fuck your

profiteering' (France 2016 p. 381). The drug, however, was still too expensive for most people to take. The Treatment and Data sect of ACT UP fell under the leadership of Mark Harrington, who championed the fight to lessen the divide between the scientist and the patient.

Larry Kramer, Peter Staley, Mark Harrington: all these men had something in common. They were all college-educated, white gay men with access to wealth. There was a certain level of education as well as financial security needed to invest in full-time activism, since many of these activists were communicating with scientists and government officials. In some ways their status helped their activism: both Kramer and Staley poured their own money into their organizations. Their ability to read through medical journals to join the scientific dialogue helped keep patients informed, and Staley's knowledge of Wall Street from his time working there was key to pulling off their protest. Still, their upper-class background kept them from being able to understand and represent the majority of PWA's. Many activists, torn between the economic, social, and scientific aspects of the epidemic began focusing more on the scientific aspect, channeling themselves into research and the politics of medical trials. While their activism was a key factor in the breakthrough of 1996, they failed to address the issues that plagued and would continue to plague PWA's on the economic and social level.

The difference between the prominent activists and most PWA's became even more apparent as the demographics of who became infected began to shift in the late 80's. A new risk group came into play: poor people of color. This was in part due to intravenous drug use fueled by economic and social hardships. While this demographic shared the same stigma as gay and bisexual men because HIV seemed to emerge from what was seen at the time as 'deviant' behavior (Worth 1990), the difference was that for people of color, this behavior was perceived as linked to poverty. With white gay men, HIV/AIDS generally caused financial hardships; with this new demographic, HIV/AIDS was usually preceded by financial hardships.

1996 - Present

In 1996, Highly Active Antiretroviral Therapy drug combinations, often known as HAART, came onto the market. These drugs meant that AIDS no longer necessarily signified a death sentence; instead, it could become a chronic but manageable disease. Of course, the reality of the post-HAART era was not that simple. Even Spencer Cox, the young activist and actor who had drafted the trial proposal that helped these drugs become available, fell into financial hardship and mental illness. He died of AIDS-related causes in 2012 (France 2016 p. 3). Poor communities of color have seen few of the benefits of the post-HAART era.

While AIDS-related deaths decreased post-HAART, the difference in mortality between affluent PWA's and poor PWA's dramatically increased. Black and poor PWA's were now considerably more likely to die of AIDS-related causes than their wealthier, white counterparts. The theory of fundamental causes, first proposed in 1995 by Jo C. Phelan and Bruce G. Link, hypothesizes that once a cure or effective treatment is found for a disease, the disease is not eradicated but instead becomes a disease of the poor. In the pre-HAART era, PWA's from low-socioeconomic status (SES) counties were 1.41 times more likely to die from AIDS-related causes than PWA's in high SES-counties. Post-HAART, this disparity rose to 2.72. Black PWA's were also 3.66 more likely to die than their white counterparts during the pre-HAART era, but 7.92 times more likely in the

post-HAART era (Rubin, Colen & Link 2010). A strong correlation has also been found to exist between rates of HIV infection and household income, those with lower incomes having higher rates of HIV. Households with an income of under \$10,000 a year have around 2.8% infection rate, while households with an income over \$50,000 a year have around a 0.2% infection rate. (Denning & DiNenno 2010). These disparities do not just indicate a struggle to obtain resources and treatment, but also demonstrate that the disparity begins at the onset of the illness.

This new inequality among death rates demonstrates what had already been hinted at with AZT pricing and other medical costs: that money is a key factor in treatment. Without money, health insurance, or other resources, HAART does very little for economically marginalized populations. It is estimated that HAART costs around \$10,000 a year (Gebo 2010), and hospitalization, treatment for opportunistic infections, and medical tests continue to add to costs. Patients now have different treatment combinations and brands to try, but all range into the thousands if not tens of thousands of dollars per year in costs (aidsinfo 2017). In 2012, Truvada, the brand name for pre-exposure prophylaxis (PREP), was introduced onto the market. If taken daily, PREP prevents HIV infection from being transmitted, but Truvada has followed the pricing trend, setting itself at \$13,000 a year. Truvada has to be prescribed before an HIV infection is present, something some doctors are unsure of or unwilling to do. Doctors may be especially unwilling if the patient is an intravenous drug user, who are often stereotyped as not being able to follow the consistent schedule needed for taking PREP (Maude 2017). Furthermore, since Truvada is a preventative measure, there is a certain amount of education that must happen on both the side of the patient and provider before it can be prescribed, a factor that can limit access in more low-income or isolated areas of the country.

Because there is no cure for HIV/AIDS, treatment must be consistent and ongoing. Being low-income, having less than a high school education, experiencing recent homelessness, being substance dependent, and having depressive symptoms are all associated with low retention rates for HIV/AIDS medication (Holtzman 2015). Homelessness and other housing issues make it more difficult for patients to keep and store medication, since many regimens require several pills to be taken daily. Due to the stigma around HIV/AIDS, homeless PWA's often feel ashamed to take their medication if they do not have a safe and private area to do so. One person living with HIV reported, 'I'm going through a situation right now with my living conditions. I haven't [taken] my medications in about three weeks now...I'm living right now in a warehouse with my cousin...' (Holtzman 2015). Appointments and prescription fillings are also more likely to be skipped if the PWA does not have health insurance or has health insurance with higher copayments. Moreover, '[what] makes it hard sometimes [is] if you don't have money to get here' (Holtzman 2015). Some clinics have adapted by creating a transportation service for those who could not otherwise make their appointments, but many clinics do not have the resources to implement such a program.

Buyers Clubs that rose up in the 80's and 90's diminished post-1996, but the underground market for medications persisted. According to one recent study of high-risk gay and bisexual men and ARV (Antiretroviral) medication use, of 189 men who were prescribed ARV medication, 27% reported having sold or traded their medication (Kurtz, Buttram & Surratt 2014). Low-income PWA's also often sell their prescribed medication for a profit. One PWA who bought and sold medication on the underground said that they 'needed the money for a bill or for something for [their] child' (Tsuyuki 2015). For others, the process of purchasing medication off the street is

more feasible than going to a doctor. One patient said, 'I had ran out (of ARVs) and dude was giving away cheap, and I didn't wanna go down there, go see the case worker and wait in them long waits' (Tsuyuki 2015). While the networks for purchasing and distributing medications are not organized the same way as they were in the pre-HAART era, the high demand for cheap and easy treatment has not diminished over the years.

The post-HAART era saw an immense demographic shift in where new AIDS diagnoses appeared in the U.S. As of 2016, 45% of all new HIV diagnoses are made in the South, particularly in black communities and urban areas (CDC, 2017). Twenty-one of the twenty-five metropolitan areas with the highest rates of HIV are located in the South (Villarosa 2017). Although New York and San Francisco still have high populations of PWA's, they are not seeing the same levels of new diagnosis. When AIDS/HIV first appeared, clinical trials to test medication often failed to recruit people of color; many had none enrolled at all (How to Survive a Plague 2012). Community efforts to combat AIDS and raise awareness also failed to reach out to people of color, leaving a gap in levels of knowledge on how to deal with the crisis. In the case of impoverished areas, HIV testing is not readily available. Planned Parenthood, one of the well-known clinics that provides low-cost or free HIV tests, has very few locations in the South, leaving poor communities of color with a deep disadvantage when HIV infections began to hit.

Black and Latino gay men are no more likely to engage in risky sexual behavior than white gay men, yet it is estimated that half of black gay men and one quarter of Latino gay men are expected to receive an HIV diagnosis during their lifetime (CDC 2016). Due to housing discrimination, Americans of color, particularly black Americans, were kept from moving into suburban sprawls. Five of the most segregated cities in America champion some of the highest rates of HIV; and once HIV is prevalent in a population, that population becomes more vulnerable to new infections. Moreover, due to the intimate nature of how HIV is spread, it is unlikely to be spread outside of the population in which it is already present, among people who share the same race and class background (Villarosa 2017). Housing segregation based on race has left communities of color more vulnerable to HIV infection even if they take the same measures of protection as those from white upper/middle class neighborhoods.

While it is no longer categorized as an epidemic, the belief that HIV/AIDS is no longer a crisis that devastates communities within the United States is false. Much of that devastation is due to the way it not only targets a person's health, but their finances as well. Separating a medical epidemic from its financial aspects is impossible when assessing its impact. Whether directly or indirectly, the AIDS crisis brought and continues to bring economic adversity to largely marginalized communities. Putting people out to pasture is not a light term; it carries heavy implications regarding the value of human life. A medical crisis like AIDS puts people out to pasture through the economic pressures placed on them, expecting the dying to pay for the right to live. If life is seen as a commodity to be bought and sold, then those who are economically disadvantaged will always be the ones predisposed to disease, hit the hardest when a medical epidemic emerges.

From San Jose, California, **Jensen Kraus** is an incoming junior who is majoring in Psychology and Hispanic Studies. He is currently working at a summer internship, researching how children learn through tangible technology. After college he hopes to go to grad school, and after that he

either wants to pursue teaching in bilingual immersion education or research in developmental psychology. Jensen's essay also won the 2018 James J. Kopp First-Year Research Award, given annually to the best research paper written by a first-year Lewis and Clark student.

Wealth, Poverty, & Wildfires: An Overview

By Emily Clark

As the earth's climate continues to shift and the temperatures rise, wildfires are becoming consistent. Almost every summer, typically beginning in late July, devastating fires roll through communities in the United States, displacing families and wildlife. Federally-subsidized cleanups and federal money cater to the rich, leaving low-income households in poverty almost indefinitely after wildfires occur. Moreover, the process of preparation and recovery favors the wealthy, while poorer, rural communities are often more susceptible to fires in the first place. When wildfires occur, all of these factors combined cause class stratification to grow across and within communities, creating a larger gap between the wealthy and poor.

Being able to afford insurance in the U.S. these days is a luxury. Homeowners' insurance often covers fire damage, while renter's insurance does not. Depending on the geographic location of one's house, the idea of paying for fire insurance is not ideal, especially since the likelihood and extent of potential fire damage is unknown. As Davies et al point out, 'While fire-prone places in the U.S. are more likely to be populated by higher-income groups, this fact threatens to overshadow the thousands of low-income individuals who also live in fire-prone places but lack the resources to prepare or recover from fire' (2018).

California presents a unique situation for wildfires. The state's urban sprawl has moved towards the countryside, and these spaces have become 'high risk corridors' (Barron and Gajanan, 2018). Fires are devastating more communities than ever before because of the density of houses in these areas, which the Forest Service calls 'the wildland-urban interface (WUI)' (Barron and Gajanan 2018). As Jason Roberts emphasizes, 'Federal wildland fire literature defines the wildland urban interface as 'the line, area, or zone where structures and other human development meet or intermingle with undeveloped wildland or vegetative fuels'' (2015, p. 61). A study conducted by Villanova University also found that in California, there has been a more than 1,000 percent increase in the number of homes and developed land in areas prone to wildfires since 1940 (Barron and Gajanan, 2018).

In 2018, the Camp Fire swept through Butte County, California, devastating poor communities that are outside some of the most wealthy and affluent areas in the U.S., such as San Francisco. A study that assessed the vulnerability of communities to wildfires across the U.S. found that 'affluent exurban regions east of the San Francisco Bay and rural areas of the eastern Sierra Nevada Mountains in California have similar wildfire potential, but relatively poorer socioeconomic conditions in the Sierra Nevada Mountains make those communities far more vulnerable to fire disaster than their exurban counterparts' (Davies et al. 2018). 17.5 percent of Shasta County's citizens are living beneath the poverty line, and to the south, in Mendocino, it's 20 percent ('Low-

Income Communities Struggle to Recover After a Wildfire’ 2018). Since 2011, these counties have been struggling with drought on and off, and it has been difficult for them to recover.

When it comes to managing natural disasters, differences in access to insurance truly show what a significant factor class can be. For those without insurance, there are services to assist with rebuilding and recovering after wildfires, but these services are never enough. When the Camp Fire struck in 2018, many people lost not only their homes and possessions but their means to support themselves. One couple—without renter’s insurance and who lost everything in the fire—were given food and clothing by ‘the Red Cross, the Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation and the Lion’s Club’ (‘Low-income Communities Struggle to Recover After a Wildfire’ 2018). FEMA then supported them with a few months of rent for a house that they shared with five other people. According to NPR, others received a trailer to live in, but only for eighteen months (‘Low-income Communities Struggle to Recover After a Wildfire’ 2018). After that, they have to find a place of their own, or they’re homeless.

Class also impacts how people prepare for wildfires. Hazards surrounding homes can cause problems if one does not have the means or the time to remove them. Middle and upper-class homeowners frequently allocate time and resources to clean up brush or dead trees surrounding their property. These services are often offered as a part of their insurance plan and if not, they have the means to hire someone else to remove fire hazards, thereby decreasing the risk of property damage. Not only are those with limited resources generally without adequate insurance and the means to effectively prepare themselves, they are also much more susceptible to the ravaging after-effects of the disaster. The 2018 California fires affected people from all socioeconomic classes. Air quality, for example, affected everyone, but only those with sufficient means were able to escape the smoke. Moreover, those without access to healthcare will disproportionately suffer the longer-term health effects of hazardous air quality.

Having a sense of security prior to, and in the midst of, a disaster is a clear distinction between the rich and the poor. During the peak of the fires, many wealthy people in San Francisco escaped to their weekend homes in Tahoe, Monterey, Reno, etc. Gabriel Thompson, writing for *The Nation*, describes the situation well; ‘The people who will bear the brunt of climate change will be the poor,’ he says. ‘The low-wage workers who keep the Bay Area humming aren’t usually afforded the luxury of working from home, or of taking days off, or of having the disposable income needed to drive hundreds of miles away and pay for a motel when the air becomes hazardous’ (2018). Those who don’t have places to go are ‘huddled in Best Westerns or on gymnasium floors and are often locked in insurance-claim limbo’ (Smiley 2018). The wealthy, on the other hand, are often found sitting in fancy hotels that will be paid for by their insurance companies, not worrying about their properties because they have hired someone else to keep watch.

Offering a significant contrast from the rural and low-income areas discussed above, Malibu and Calabasas—both home to many celebrities—were also affected by the recent California fires. Before a fire, insurance crews employed by the wealthy may assess homes for potential fire hazards, clean up debris, install sprinklers, and spray fire retardant around the property. Some clients even get texts about fire paths and evacuation routes. Amy Bach, the director of the insurance education nonprofit Unity Policyholders, points out that ‘[insurance] is a capitalist system, by and large, with for-profit companies’ (Smiley 2018). Kim Kardashian and Kanye West, both infamously wealthy

celebrities, hired private firefighters to protect their multi-million-dollar home in Calabasas from the fires. Some insurance companies, such as theirs, have their own ‘Wildfire Protection Units’ that include pre-fire and even dispatch for-hire firefighters when the fire strikes.

Counter to this privatization of firefighting, there are many who have invested in firefighting as a public service. Volunteer fire departments, very popular until recently, have been historically important social institutions, ‘often commingling middle-class and working-class men of many ethnicities in the virtuous activity of defending their city from conflagration’ (Madrigal 2018). The privatization of firefighting provides another unfortunate example of how the wealthy will be much more prepared for future natural disasters than those from lower classes. Even without private firefighters, the response from public firefighting departments varies according to their funding and location. A poor rural area will be hit harder by a wildfire than a wealthy community since poorer communities are generally underfunded, with access to fewer public services. It is difficult not to interpret these phenomena as evidence that we value wealthy people and their property much more than we value poor people’s lives and livelihoods.

On the surface, it may seem like the goal of firefighting and battling other types of natural disasters is simply to protect resources and save lives. However, there are larger, underlying institutions and values that influence the industries that manage the land, its people, and its resources. The United States has been and will continue to be a capitalist society for the foreseeable future. This system is mainly driven by wealth, and as Roberts mentions, ‘The social side cannot be evaded as somehow radically different from its ecological integument... The circulation of money and capital have to be construed as ecological variables every bit as important as the circulation of air and water’ (2015 p. 62). Since those with money often claim the lion’s share of political power, the poorer among us are virtually disenfranchised when it comes to creating policies related to the land and natural resources. Wildfires, like other natural disasters, have become a part of our political economy and an extension of capitalism, which favors wealthier classes.

Forest fires are a natural process, but when they are mismanaged, they can turn into disasters. I would argue that if the forests were managed properly, fires would be less of a risk and less intense for communities. Effective prevention plays a role in this discussion of class and wildfires because the wealthy have the ability to influence politics and, therefore, forest management. Fire management has historically been focused on suppression, or reducing heat output and spread from fires, because it ‘protects the economic interests of the United States’ (Roberts 2015 p. 63). It serves upper-class interests, such as real estate developers who seek to take advantage of scenic and recreational opportunities that appeal to the wealthy. Viewing forest fires as a threat to resource revenues, rather than as a threat to communities and people first, is a serious problem. A focus on protecting the interests of insurance companies and developers veers away from finding more sustainable solutions to stem the threat of wildfires, and only further increases class stratification.

In recent years, the popularity of land within the wildland-urban interface (WUI) has dramatically impacted fire management in California, with more people than ever wanting to move to ‘wild places.’ But who can afford to do that while still having the security of a protected home? In 2001, the revised National Fire Plan had a goal ‘to slow or stop wildland fires from threatening *high-value areas*’ (Roberts 2015 p. 67). The definition of ‘high value areas’ is ambiguous but somewhat

sinister. Many fire mitigation crews only work on pricey vacation homes that can range from \$200,000-\$4 million, which line the edges of woodland areas in order to achieve increased privacy. Millions of dollars are spent managing overgrown forests that encroach on property lines, but shouldn't the money be going to the recovery process?

The U.S. government provides a budget and grants each year to states for natural disaster management. In 2018, out of the 284 disasters declared by the state of California, 210 of them were wildfires, according to FEMA (2019). FEMA provides millions of dollars in fire grants to the state every year, and since 2005 they have provided \$548 million. Although this may seem like a generous amount, the amount of *individual assistance* is extremely low, totaling only \$11 million since 2005 (FEMA 2019). The role of FEMA in the California wildfires is to support the state, which then uses its discretion to dole out funds to organizations. Oftentimes, this assistance does not go to those who are most in need, because 'it's allocated according to cost-benefit calculations meant to minimize taxpayer risk' (Benincasa & Hersher 2019). Those who rent 'are ineligible for much of the federal assistance available to homeowners for rebuilding after a fire event' (Davies et al. 2018). Those with homeowners' insurance benefit not only from their insurance policy, but also from federal aid. Lower-class groups in the U.S. struggle doubly because they are receiving little to no federal recovery aid, which pushes them further into poverty. A few months of subsidized rent is not going to allow displaced poor people to find an affordable, stable home under such dire conditions. Especially in places that are still recovering from fires, a few months is also not enough time to rebuild lost houses or adequate new homes. According to the *LA Times*, 'Altogether, an unprecedented 21,000 homes across Northern California have been lost in the last 14 months to fire' (Parvini & Simani 2018). This is a tremendous amount of loss, and the government does not provide *nearly* enough funding to rebuild these communities.

In order to access federally-granted funds, a governor must request that the president declare a state of emergency to invoke the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (Nixon 2018). When Trump declared the California fires a state of emergency in November 2018, the government approved and set aside \$12.7 million for survivors affected in three counties: Butte, Ventura, and Los Angeles. Although this may seem like an ample amount, it only 'includes grants for temporary housing and home repairs and low-cost loans to cover uninsured property losses' (Nixon 2018). Residents could also *apply* for grants for food and shelter at disaster recovery centers set up by FEMA and the state (Nixon 2018). It is absurd that people have to *apply* in order to get help with food following a disaster. Communities who face the initial devastation from fires face a secondary trauma from the inadequacy of recovery assistance.

The states are essentially on their own when it comes to handling wildfires and other environmental disasters. Although FEMA does support them throughout the process, they aren't the main agency in control. In California, the governor's office manages the state and its ability to fight wildfires, while FEMA coordinates other agencies to support the state. Many states do not have the budget to help everyone recover, and that is what leads to the large class stratification seen after wildfires. Since the fiscal year for the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection starts July 1, the budget for fires in 2018 was drained quickly. In July alone, the department spent \$115 million of its designated \$443 million (Shoot 2018). The state needed another \$234 million in order to keep fighting the fires, which explains why so many communities are still struggling to recover, even with the minimal support they would have received. From past disasters, FEMA has

received legitimate criticism, because it is often underprepared, disorganized, and underestimates the extent of damage. This happened in with Hurricane Katrina, where there were not enough supplies in the designated shelters (Nixon 2018). FEMA's disarray could at least partially explain why lower-income communities struggle to survive after these fires.

There is good reason to believe that, as the earth warms, we will see more natural disasters that will increase in their intensity. Research indicates that some segments of humanity will suffer significantly more than others and that, in the United States, socioeconomic status will directly influence one's degree of suffering and ability to recover. There is also evidence that those with less class privilege run a significant risk of falling deeper into poverty after a natural disaster strikes. Disparities in access to insurance protection and the services provided to the insured before, during, and after a wildfire are vast. The privatization of firefighting and concomitant decline of volunteer fire departments, in addition to the politicization of forest management in favor of the rich, puts added pressure on poor communities during wildfires, allowing the wealthy to not only maintain their survival but also their economic status. FEMA's unequal distribution of aid to wealthier communities, in order to minimize 'taxpayer risk,' further isolates the lower classes in their recovery attempts. In the case of California, some may never recover from the fires, which continue to rage. Researchers are predicting that there will be even more fires this summer (Predictive Services/National Interagency Fire Center, 2019). The class demographics of urban and rural areas can change practically overnight in fire-prone areas of states like California. In order to plan future solutions for wildfires, diverse populations must be prioritized in order to promote stability for members of all classes.

Emily Clark is a rising sophomore at Lewis and Clark who plans to major in Environmental Studies. Being from the resort town of Whitefish, Montana, has shaped her interests and goals. She has worked with many Whitefish-area nonprofits that focus on conservation, public land, and water rights/quality. 'Class is something that I am definitely aware of,' she says. 'The class makeup of my town is certainly upper-middle class. It is interesting to compare the makeup of my town to the towns surrounding it, because it is quite a contrast.'

All Walled In: How Gated Communities Are Dividing America

By Jenna Timmerman

Growing up in Phoenix, my family moved often, but I was able to spend a lot of time at my best friend's house. She was an only child with two parents, and they lived in a big five-bedroom house with an enormous backyard and pool. With my three siblings and I always living in two or three-bedroom places, I never understood what prompted such a small family to live in such a big space. Stepping out of my home, I could turn right to the main road and see the grocery store, freeway just behind. However, to get to my best friend's house it was a twenty-minute drive to the next town over, a stop with some security guards at a gatehouse, and then twist after turn until we got to the very back of a *country club*. Her family would occasionally take me to their country club pool, and I would get super excited about the free shampoo and mouthwash in the bathroom, because it was crazy to me that they would just give those items away! I suppose this is where my

fascination with gates and gated communities comes from. Why couldn't I live in this country club? The houses were nice—maybe my siblings and I could have our own rooms and a big backyard! My parents always told me we could not go there. I knew we were different from most of the people at my school, so I stopped asking. I soon grew to learn about social classes. I quickly caught on to the fact that I was low-class and most of the people at my school were upper-middle class.

For some historical background, Phoenix is one of the fastest growing cities in America right now. According to Gallen (2018), Arizona was ranked No.4 on the U.S. Census for 'fastest-growing states,' and 'Arizona continues to prove itself as an unbeatable place to live, raise a family and retire.' Gated communities have contributed a lot to the 'raising a family and retiring' part. From Figure 1, we see that there was a spark in the development of gated communities in the U.S. in the 1960s. This trend was middle-class dominated and stemmed from planned retirement communities, a 'walling off' phenomenon that eventually led to resorts, country clubs, and finally the modern suburbs most common today. Growing up in Phoenix for 18 years, I watched these gated communities physically be built from the ground up, and there was a dramatic increase in their development starting in 2000, the year I was born.¹⁸ Also, according to 2009 U.S. Census Bureau data, '10 million housing units are in gated communities... [and] roughly 10 percent of the occupied homes in this country are in gated communities' (Benjamin 2012). Of all these homes, the growth of gated communities is most prominent in the 'sunbelt of the southwest and southeast'— Arizona, California, Texas, and Florida (Blakey & Synder 1997).

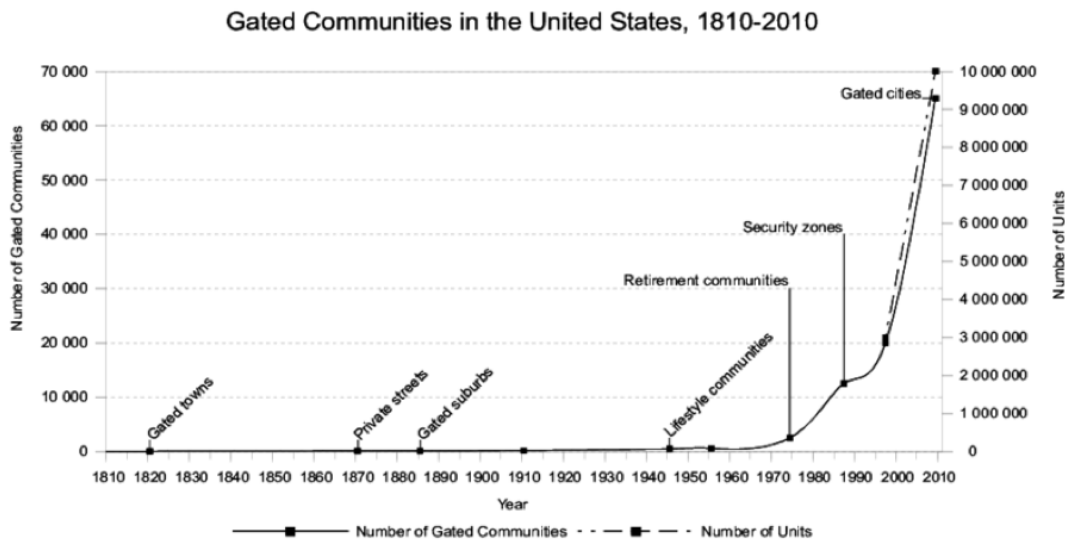


Figure 1: Graph showing the growing phenomenon of gated communities in the United States. Source Info: Paulouro Neves, Joao. The Eradication of Public Space: Dissolving Liminal States (ResearchGate 2012).

Not only am I interested in why gated communities are growing in number at such a rapid pace, but I also want to know more about the social and political impacts of the phenomenon. I believe that gated communities are working as a form of discrimination, which will only lead to further separation of people from different backgrounds, increasing class and race divides. Before diving

¹⁸ *Editor's Note:* During Jenna's in-class presentation on her essay, we discussed the likelihood that this post-2000 surge in gated communities was related to fear of the 'other' generated after the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

into how gated communities discriminate, however, it is important to determine what counts as a ‘gated community.’ There are many factors to consider in this definition, including whether the community is surrounded by gates or fences, does there need to be a security guard, are there cameras and monitors, etc. For the sake of clarity, Atkinson and Blandy (2005) state:

[Gated] communities may therefore be defined as walled or fenced housing developments, to which public access is restricted, characterized by legal agreements which tie the residents to a common code of conduct and (usually) collective responsibility for management (p. 178).

Gated communities must include some sort of barrier, like a gate or wall. Public access is limited, but it’s not impossible to get in. Not being impossible to enter means that any person with a code for a call box can get in, or anyone with a connection to another person within can access the inside. ‘public’ refers to any persons not a resident of the establishment. Finally, the residents are bound to act a certain way, and maintain their properties a certain way, to uphold the community appearance. This includes the outside of homes needing to be up to a standard, i.e. lawns being well cleaned and trimmed.

One type of ‘gate’ that everyone know about is the fencing on the border between Mexico and the United States. You might be wondering what this has to do with the gated communities of the upper-middle class—it has everything to do with this. The border fence is a gate, and the U.S. government is using a tactic called *prevention through deterrence* to enforce its boundaries. Prevention through deterrence is described by Jason de Leon: ‘The terrible things that this mass of migrating people experience en route are neither random nor senseless, but rather part of a strategic federal plan that has rarely been publicly illuminated and exposed for what it is: a killing machine that simultaneously uses and hides behind the viciousness of the Sonoran Desert’ (2015). The government uses the desert terrain as a type of ‘gate’ to keep certain people in the U.S. and certain people out. In this case, U.S. citizens are inside and non-citizens, most commonly people from Mexico, El Salvador, and Honduras, are outside the border. The ‘outside’ people who try to cross this brutal landscape often do not make it to the inside. As a result of prevention through deterrence, the U.S. government places the blame for hazards faced by those who try to cross on the environment, instead of taking responsibility for lives lost. Comparing this analysis to the use of barriers in gated communities, it can be said that the people inside are using gates around their homes as a mechanism to drive unwanted people out. They are intentionally separating themselves. Looking more closely at this separation, *who* exactly is inside the gates and *who* exactly is outside? This question will help in our understanding of the motives and reasoning behind this separation.

Gated communities do have positive features, or else people would not be moving to them. Pros include having more privacy, a sense of safety, lack of solicitors, no commuter traffic, and quieter streets. However, this all comes at a cost. One homebuyer commented on a post in a realty column, saying, ‘I opted for a home in a gated community when we moved to a new city... just didn’t know it well and figured it was a smart move. Could be a waste of money but I think my family feels a little safer’ (Dean 2016). People who move to gated communities are paying a lot more money in the long term, but the only real reward is *feeling* safer. While conducting research in a gated community, Setha Low (2003) noted that the ‘desire for safety, security, community, and ‘niceness,’ as well as wanting to live near people like themselves because of the fear of ‘others’

and of crime, is not unique to this family, but expressed by most residents living in gated communities.’ However, gated communities do not provide more *actual* safety than non-gated communities of a similar socioeconomic status (Atkinson and Blandy 2005, p. 181). The gates are acting as a placebo.

People move to these communities in order to feel safer and provide a so-called better environment for their children. It is documented that ‘gated communities can be seen as a response to the fear of crime’ (Atkinson and Blandy 2005 p. 178). There is this idea that by placing oneself inside of a gate, you will be safe, from crime, from outsiders, and from economic uncertainty. However, as Sarah Goodyear argued in a 2013 *Atlantic* article, ‘By fostering suspicion and societal divisions... gated communities can paradoxically compromise safety rather than increasing it.’ On 26 February 2012, Trayvon Martin was fatally shot and killed by George Zimmerman inside a gated community in Florida. Trayvon was with his father, visiting his father’s fiancée when he left their home to get a snack at a 7-11. Zimmerman was on duty for neighborhood watch and was known for frequently calling police about ‘suspicious individuals,’ all of whom were black males (Goodyear 2013). It is no accident that a 17-year-old black male was the target of his paranoia. Robert Steuteville points out that a factor in Trayvon’s death was a ‘poorly planned, exclusionary environment’ (Goodyear 2013). Gates are supposed to provide safe environments, but it does not always work like that—unless you are an upper-middle class, white individual. Gated communities are raising Americans to become more exclusionary, and fearful, than ever.

Rich Benjamin writes, ‘Gated communities churn a vicious cycle by attracting like-minded residents who seek shelter from outsiders and whose physical seclusion then worsens paranoid groupthink against outsiders’ (2012). Who are these ‘outsiders’? Since people tend to move to these communities to be around ‘like-minded and similar people’ (Goodyear 2013), there tends to be little diversity. As with the Trayvon Martin tragedy, it is clear that ‘like-minded’ refers to people of the same skin color, this typically being majority white. Further, things such as a gate, cameras, guard officer, etc. all entail an extra cost of living—something that only those of a certain class background can afford. Seta Low, an anthropologist who grew up in west Los Angeles, remembers not being able to visit her best friend, Dolly, who lived inside a gated community. Dolly’s mother told her that Low could not come over anymore. Low recalls, ‘At school the next day, I ask Dolly what happened... All that she can tell me is that I am ‘low class’ (Low 2003). Low was young, and there was nothing she could do, once outside those gates. This story demonstrates how wanting to be around ‘like-minded’ people also refers to one’s socioeconomic status. The gated community majority will be made up of upper-middle class white Americans, while the people outside the gates include anyone of a lower class as well as people of color.

Low’s young niece is also being raised inside a gated community. One day, Low and her niece left the community to get some food. Low recalls, ‘We were driving next to a truck with some day laborers and equipment in the back, and we were stopped beside them at the light. She wanted to move because she was afraid those people were going to come and get her. They looked scary to her’ (2003). In her ethnography, Low describes her niece as ‘[feeling] threatened when she sees poor people’ (2003). The word choices of *threatened* and *poor* are interesting; these day-laborers were also Latino, and simply doing their jobs. A young person being raised in seclusion shows fear toward those who do not look like her, which takes us back to the ‘like-minded’ people idea. The ‘gating’ of a child’s life, within this white upper-middle class community, directly impacts

how she views others, which as a result makes her a more fearful person when she ventures outside the gates (Atkinson and Blandy 2005 p. 181). This early-life seclusion will result in misunderstanding people different from her, and further contribute to separation between socio-economic classes and races. As young people behind these gates grow up with that kind of mindset, they will develop a divided view of the United States, and this will continue to strain our larger, national and international community.

Not only do housing developers notice how this divide is growing, but they are using the rise of gated communities to their advantage. Writing in *Le Journal International*, Laura Wojcik discusses the American phenomenon of gates from an outsider's perspective:

The more social and racial inequalities increase, the more housing developers will sell gated neighborhoods easily. Wealthy people will always have money to spend in fences that would set them apart from the poor. But, by living socially isolated in their homes, it is quite likely that the rich will become even more paranoid towards people who do not look like their neighbors. As a result, coexistence between various social classes will be increasingly challenging (2013).

The rise in paranoia of the wealthy is respective to the rise in gated communities; paranoia is produced through fear of what we do not know. The rise in fear of *others* and the unknown that wealthier people hold is exactly why barriers are being built. We see this on the southern border of The United States and, now, within our cities too. People are trying to separate themselves from diversity in a country like America *known for its diversity*. Those most affected are children. From a young age, children begin building their own beliefs, but gates are giving the future of this country an unnecessarily fearful mindset. Gated communities are acting as a form of discrimination, which is dividing the United States in how we see and work with one another.

Jenna Timmerman grew up in Phoenix, Arizona, and is studying Rhetoric and Media Studies/Economics. She is from a working-class background. 'I have lived in about 15 different homes and have never had a stable home environment—just trying to find somewhere to sleep when I can,' she shares. 'However, through unstable homes, I have always had sports. I hope to one day open and run my own volleyball club. As for right now, I am just a first-generation college student with big dreams of helping kids in situations like mine through the power of sports.'

Sex Workers, Power, and Stigma

By Emma Bryan

The job title 'sex worker' contains one word that is far more interesting than the other. As such, American discourse on the subject matter has been relatively focused on the 'sex' aspect of sex work. 'Sex workers,' as historian and sex worker advocate Melinda Chateaufvert explains, 'are laborers who earn money to perform sexual services or who provide erotic entertainment to clients, individually and collectively' (2015 p. 2). But, as sex workers are workers it is relevant to ask: where do they belong in the American class system? Class is difficult to define. To economist

Michael Zweig, ‘Class is about the power some people have over the lives of others, and the powerlessness most people experience as a result’ (Zweig 2012 p. 8). For the sake of deepening an understanding of the class of sex workers and the complexities that come with comprehending any working-class job, Zweig’s theories about class will be taken as assumptions. But, power is complicated. Where one may have power in their job in some ways, in others they may be lacking. There is no simple way to compare and contrast drastically different forms of power; stigmatization and criminalization have stunted the sex worker community’s attempts to obtain power. Generally speaking, sex workers have little autonomy in their work lives, but they have sexuality as a potential form of power. However, the sex worker community has unique difficulties validating their own work *as* work, which separates them from the rest of the working world. This complication lessens the power that sex workers have over their jobs. Finding empowerment through eroticism, moreover, is its own form of extra labor, and isn’t exactly equal in social value to labor performed by other members of the working class, who receive the respect of a job that is more ‘morally acceptable.’ This power is legitimacy. In the United States, sex workers are generally seen as criminals rather than legitimate members of society. The different forms of power that sex workers experience and don’t experience all come together to define and complicate their class standing.

The debate around sex work focuses on whether or not sex work is good work. In public discussions about any other job, the conversation may center around wages or safety, but the sex work conversation finds itself centered around whether it should exist at all. This stigma takes away from the conversation that should be occurring: the need to hold sex work clients, business owners, and greater society accountable for harming sex workers. Sex work’s longevity can be seen through the way that the ‘demand for sexual entertainment seems almost recession proof,’ (Chateauvert 2015 p. 128). Chateauvert also emphasizes, again, that sex work is ‘a job; it pays the bills. Some people like the work, some don’t, and many have mixed feelings’ (122). Yet if people remain focused on the *sex* part of sex work rather than creating safety standards for sex workers, this reinforces cultural taboos against a form of work that has always existed, and will continue to exist.

For sex work, one step further than stigmatization is criminalization, which makes acquiring any sort of labor standards impossible. Through making the work illegal, the U.S. government ensures that it will be less safe than other forms of work; little is done to take care of sex workers’ health or protect them from violence. Moreover, in the public’s discussion of sex work, sex workers themselves aren’t the prioritized voice. As sex worker advocates Lacey Sloan and Stephanie Wahab remind us, ‘Prior to 1973, it was rarely acknowledged that sex workers were capable of speaking for themselves’ (2000 p. 466). It’s hard for these workers to speak out as they risk outing themselves as criminals—or in the case of legal sex work, they put themselves at risk of violence. Police haven’t acknowledged that sex workers are an especially at-risk population for sexual assault, and that they deserve protection like any other citizens (Sloan and Wahab 2000 p. 473). ‘Denial of treatment following physical assault or rape and general hostility from public-sector providers was also found to be common [among sex workers],’ adds Ine Vanwesenbeeck (2017 p. 1635). When a part of the conversation, sex workers are against criminalization. Sex worker Lori Adorable, in an interview with Ruth Jacobs, said that ‘how workers feel about [their] jobs is irrelevant to the basic human right to safe working conditions, and it’s been proven that partial

criminalization is anathema to safety' (Jacobs 2014). The combination of stigma with this culture of criminalization has left sex workers with little power over their labor or working environment.

Legal sex work is heavily restricted by regulations like the Stop Enabling Sex Trafficking Act (SESTA) and the Allow States and Victims to Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act (FOSTA), laws passed in early 2018. Advocates say these laws are intended to fight sex trafficking, but in reality they effect sex workers' safety. When the phrase 'sex trafficking' is used, two people collaborating typically isn't the first image that comes to mind. But legally, trafficking could be two prostitutes working together. If it's not isolated, it's 'sex trafficking.' As Vanwesenbeeck notes, 'Trafficking may be legally defined in such a way that sex workers' regular practices of sharing space, sharing information, and dictating the manner in which they conduct their business are considered trafficking' (2017 p. 1633). Today's sex workers regularly use online resources to keep themselves safe and find work. It is mostly free and low-cost websites affected by SESTA/FOSTA, primarily hurting those of a lower class or those who cannot 'class pass' by making their own websites or being able to afford the more professional ones (McCombs 2018). In a recent *Huffington Post* interview, a sex worker named Arabelle noted that technology is being targeted as a tool for trafficking when in reality it takes away what keeps her work safe: online platforms (McCombs 2018).

In addition to heavy legal restrictions put on sex workers, there are few social services available to them, and the ones that exist focus on 'rehabilitation.' Rehabilitation programs don't recognize sex work as real work, and frame the workers as victims. Such programs focus on abolishing sex work instead of creating better labor standards within the field (Vanwesenbeeck 2017 p. 1634). Rehabilitation programs also work off of the assumption that rape is to be expected from the illegal forms of sex work. Sex workers' voices are only used to extend the narrative that these programs promote rather than providing a platform for the workers, no matter how their stories fit into the rehabilitative picture. 'For those working in the antiprostitution rescue industry, sex workers are limited to performing as stock characters in a story they are not otherwise a part of, in the pity porn which the 'expert' journalists, filmmakers, and NGO staff will produce, profit from, and build their power on,' argues Melissa Gira Grant in *Playing the Whore* (2014 p. 104). This 'rescue industry,' by not recognizing sex work as legitimate work, greatly compromises sex workers' agency and ability to empower themselves.

Through the 'sex part' of sex work, sex workers—when given the opportunity—can reclaim some power taken from them due to systemic stigmatization and social opposition to their work. Sex workers aren't viewed as real workers, but on a micro-level, they utilize their position of sexual power to attempt to combat some of the stigma they face and get the things they need. The micro-level distinction is important to make, as in general, sex workers have little to no tangible power over their work lives, in Zweig's sense. Many, however, do *feel* empowered. They can make a living for themselves, and find a sense of purpose through their work. For most sex workers, 'their sense of power doesn't come from money, beauty, fame or giving society the middle finger. It comes from feeling that their work has meaning, that the sacrifices were worth it and that if they had it to do over again, they wouldn't change a thing' (Noelle 2015). Thus, on this smaller level, sex workers may find empowerment as individuals; as a group, however, they still make no real material gains, as their status in society hasn't changed.

But could this kind of micro-level sexual power, under the right circumstances, be a pathway to social power? As illustrated by the example of Mistress Velvet, a black sex worker advocate and dominatrix, sex work has the potential to help some clients work through their ignorance and prejudice. Mistress Velvet uses her position of sexual power to advocate for real social change. While working as a dominatrix, she teaches her (typically) cisgender white male ‘slaves’ black feminist theory. Assigning her slaves texts by Audre Lorde and Patricia Hill Collins, she uses the medium of BDSM (Bondage, Dominance & Submission, Sadism & Masochism) to gain what she refers to as a kind of ‘reparations’ for the racist treatment of black people in America, and feels empowered in her job. ‘I kind of have this weird, dual relationship with my fetishization [as a black woman] where I use it to get clients, but then I really wanna process through it with them as well,’ Mistress Velvet has said (*Buzzfeed News* 2018, 2:43-3:11). Without her sexual ‘allure,’ such exchanges wouldn’t be possible. Though Mistress Velvet is powerful inside her dungeon, unfortunately as she leaves she again becomes a stigmatized black woman and sex worker. But through her impact on her clients, Mistress Velvet turns the simulated power of a BDSM scene into actualized power, where her clients view her less as a sexual object and more as a person with a voice.

As a collective, the only real way for sex workers to empower themselves is through organizing. Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics (COYOTE), a sex worker rights advocacy group that has existed since 1973, clarifies that prostitutes are not selling their bodies but are rather being paid for their time and skills. They work to combat the close association between sex work and sex trafficking, and also argue that the criminalization of prostitutes takes away from a focus on real crime, wasting taxpayer money (Jeness 1990 p. 406). Being organized and run by sex workers themselves, organizations like COYOTE give sex workers ways to pool their power and fight to get into the public conversation surrounding their work. From 2005 to 2011, *\$pread* magazine, ‘essentially a community bulletin and lifestyle guide for sex workers in New York and beyond’ (Cafolla 2015), also gave sex workers an anonymous platform to express and consume things meaningful to them in an accessible medium. The topics range from what it’s like to be a person-of-color (POC) stripper to tips on marketing yourself online. Though it looked similar to the white and cisgender ‘women’s magazine’ model at the beginning, *\$pread* eventually broadened its sense of who sex workers are, showing people of color, men, and transgender sex workers (Aimee et al. 2015 p. 19). It made their opinions and stories known to the public, in addition to fostering a sense of community between workers that was badly needed. *\$pread* closed its doors due to a lack of financial support and staffing, a problem sex worker advocacy has faced throughout history.

The policy-making establishment has discovered that sex workers want to collaborate, and has responded with division. Laws like SESTA/FOSTA are intended to keep sex workers from speaking to each other, and police target online ads and set sex workers up for stings (Grant 2014 p. 63). Additionally, government-regulated sex work isn’t designed to be profitable or secure for workers. As Chateauvert observes, ‘By design, job security for dancers and related jobs is nil and the benefits nonexistent. The constantly replenishing supply of women applying for these ‘low-skill’ job keeps wages at the most minimum level, when workers are paid at all. Workers mention arbitrarily enforced rules, fines, and demerits that reduce their earnings’ (2015 p. 137). Any attempts by sex workers to gain autonomy over their work are fought with backlash from supervisors, frequently in the form of losing a job. In *Strip Club: Gender, Power, and Sex Work* (2010), Kim Price-Glynn shares the following account:

Erin, a stripper in her mid-twenties, described developing a red rash on her knees while working in one such club. The rash, she later learned, was ringworm that she and other dancers contracted from the club's carpet. Disgusted, a group of dancers got together and collectively demanded the owner clean or pull up the carpet. In response, the club asked the entire group of dancers to leave. The club's position, Erin explained, was that it could hire new strippers at a moment's notice (p. 101).

These workers are treated as disposable. As dancers often start working at a relatively young age, this could be one of their only forms of work experience, trapping them in a cycle of such poor working conditions. And management makes certain that workers don't have power.

Organization, in theory, provides opportunities for regulations on the side of the workers. Though uncommon, when places like strip clubs do organize, sex workers can voice concerns about their wages and working conditions. In 2012, strippers working for the Spearmint Rhino chain won a \$13 million civil lawsuit settlement, an unprecedented amount of money at the time (Grant 2012). Sadly, these lawsuits do very little in setting any sort of precedent due to lack of public notice and the massive control companies have over strippers (unless, of course, they are allowed to set the terms for the public conversation about themselves). Moreover, as Montana dancer Bubbles Burbujas has commented, regulations put in place ostensibly to help sex workers often only makes things worse. 'Before the move to the paycheck system, dancers paid a \$25 stage fee per shift, as well as tips to bouncers and the DJ, 'but we kept the rest of our dance money,' she explains. 'Now you hand over \$70 of the first \$100 you make, and you get a minimum wage paycheck, where you get back 30 percent or 40 percent of that'' (Grant 2012). With little support from the public, sex workers can easily be stripped of the 'benefits' of regulated sex work by profit-hungry management.

While using Zweig's model of class as defined by power, it is important to mention the way race comes into play. Racism is integrated into all aspects of American society, and sex work is no exception; in many cases, it amplifies it. Indian stripper Mona Salim notes that the intimacy and fantasies the strip club fosters create an 'anything goes' type environment (Salim 2015 p. 40). The commercialization of intimacy can make customers feel as if they are in a space where they can mold sex workers of color into extreme versions of stereotypes. These workers often find themselves playing into such stereotypes, as they need to please the customer to make a living, intensifying the day-to-day racism that they already face. Furthermore, as Mireille Miller-Young notes, 'Women of color are consistently discriminated against in the pornography industry. On average they are paid half to three-quarters of what white actresses are offered' (2015 p. 86). Sex workers of color have fewer opportunities than white workers to choose which gigs they take. If a black actress wants to be in a film, she will most likely have to play a role she's uncomfortable with. 'One of the most common roles for black and Latina [pornography] actresses has been the maid' (Miller-Young 2015 p. 86). Not only does this capitalize on racist stereotypes for profit and pleasure, but it constricts how sex workers of color are portrayed to audiences, perpetuating the fetishization of people of color in a cyclical manner.

Capitalism's power is contingent on isolation. The separation of sex workers, by government, law, and business-management, only adds to the stigma they face. American discourse around sex work needs to shift from qualifying the work as good or bad to a conversation about workplace safety

and other labor concerns. Sex workers' class is complicated, but ultimately they are members of an oppressed group, not victims. Every sex worker is different, and has their own opinion about the work that they do—but the personal is not applicable to the need to create a general climate of safety and fair labor conditions for these workers. Standards should be set for sex work *as work*, not for the public.

Originally from Missoula, Montana, **Emma Bryan** is a rising sophomore pursuing a major in Psychology. After college she hopes to earn a master's in social work. She is from an upper-middle class background and is hoping to use her privileged position to help those facing more class adversity. Being an ally is what inspired Emma to pursue social work and advocate heavily for and encourage class mobility for sex workers.

An Alien Right to Education: Challenges on the Path to Higher Education for Undocumented Immigrants in the U.S.

By Maya Khavary

Introduction

Researchers have used the theory of social capital to understand the rate of low-income students accessing higher education in the United States, which has also brought many challenges faced by college-bound undocumented students to light. Social capital can be defined as 'the framework for accomplishing a particular goal through a set of available resources based on trust and cooperation among people' (Garcia and Tierney 2011 p. 111). While social capital fails to directly provide individuals with economic capital, it can encourage the development of necessary skills and networking that lead to an increase in economic capital. Understanding the concept of social capital allows us to have a deeper understanding of undocumented students' ability to pursue their goals in the face of the unique inequalities they face.

The U.S. Census Bureau reported 2.5 million undocumented immigrants under the age of 18 living in U.S in the year 2000 (The U.S. Census Bureau Website). 40% of these immigrants simultaneously fall into the student category; every year, 6,000-8,000 of these students graduate from American high schools. Most of these students have lived in the U.S. for 5 years and hold the academic skills necessary to attend college; however, their legal status raises challenges, restricting their access to higher education. Undocumented immigrant students are a minority on American college campuses, and many colleges fail to accommodate or assist these students with specific legal, financial and academic challenges they face. In this essay, I will discuss the three categories of challenges that undocumented immigrant students face in their higher educational experience: legal, financial, and academic. By discussing these challenges and their specific roots, I hope to spread increased awareness of their struggles to inspire a change in academic policies.

Legal Challenges

Undocumented immigrant students' legal status simultaneously restricts their access to higher education and their means of basic survival. When a student is undocumented, it is difficult to gain access to healthcare, legal employment and permanent residency, let alone maintain good academic standing in colleges and universities. An undocumented immigrant is defined as 'a foreign-born person who: (a) doesn't have a legal right to be or (b) remain in the United States' (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Website). Undocumented students are generally foreign nationals who have entered the U.S. without inspection or with fraudulent documents, or more simply, who have entered legally as nonimmigrants but then violated the terms of their status, remaining in the U.S. without authorization. Most undocumented immigrants arrive on U.S. soil after escaping existing conflicts in their home countries. Most have left behind all of their valuable possessions and assets.

The United States Citizenship and Immigration Service (formerly known as the INS) requires these immigrants to undergo a costly and lengthy process in order to apply for permanent residency (US Citizenship and Immigration Services Website), and yet there is no indication of the approval of their cases; there is no reassurance that these students and their families will be granted legal residency regardless of their reasons behind immigrating. This makes it nearly impossible for immigrants to pursue legal residency within the United States in good faith. Extensive restrictions force immigrants to pursue a life in constant hiding, forcing them to give up their basic human right to 'pursuit of happiness.'

Undocumented immigrant students don't hold work permits, but must still find work. Being illegally employed means these students are also subject to labor exploitation while committing a crime that can result in imprisonment and deportation. The fact that their employment is considered illegal is often overlooked both by society and academic institutions. The legal status of undocumented students also disqualifies them from obtaining health insurance or simple the access to health care, both of which are often necessary to pursue a higher education.

Considering all the disadvantages, undocumented immigrants manage to survive and send their children to school. However, these students' access to higher education, specifically postsecondary education, is strongly restricted by policies and laws designed to discourage them from even thinking about school. For instance, the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (IIRIRA) states:

'[An] alien who is not lawfully present in the United States shall not be eligible on the basis of residence within a State... for any postsecondary education benefit' (Title 8, Chapter 14, Sec. 1623).

Although the act does not specifically prohibit undocumented immigrants' access to higher education, it eliminates financial aid for these students. In simpler words, these policies eradicate undocumented immigrant students' right to education by refusing financial assistance, with the knowledge that almost all undocumented immigrant families do not have the financial means to support and fund a college degree in U.S.

Over the years the number of undocumented immigrant students who are eligible to attend college has increased drastically. In a number of states, this has resulted in positive in-state policy reform with regards to financial assistance. In New York, the in-state tuition policy was changed in 2012:

'Nonresidents of New York State and out-of-status (undocumented) students who attended a New York State high school for at least two years and graduated, or obtained a New York State GED diploma, may apply for in-state tuition if they apply to CUNY within five years of receiving their diploma' (New York In-State Tuition Policy).

Currently 18 U.S. states have revised their policies in regard to undocumented immigrant students since the year 2000. However, this process has not been easy; there have been series of proposed legislation in order to repeal these policies. For example, a lawsuit filed in California suggests that these sorts of policies violate federal law, mainly by out-of-state residents attending public institutions (Paz Maya Olivérez 2015 p. 120).

Unfortunately, federal policies remain the same. The only recent attempt to challenge undocumented immigrant students' access to higher education at the federal level is the *D.R.E.A.M.* Act (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors): proposed legislation with a multi-phased process aiming to provide undocumented students with an easier path towards higher education as well as legalization. The *D.R.E.A.M.* Act would also repeal some of the provisions of the IIRIRA that specifically prevent states from offering financial assistance to undocumented immigrant students. This bill has been sidelined by renewed debate over the Sensenbrenner Bill. Originally introduced by judiciary chairman James Sensenbrenner in 2005, this bill aims to criminalize undocumented immigrants and any person or entity that assists them. The Trump administration, unsurprisingly, has put a greater emphasis on this bill in recent years (Paz Maya Olivérez 2015 p. 120).

The U.S. government creates endless barriers to prevent undocumented students from academic achievement, which violates their human rights. It can be difficult to navigate these legalities, as being undocumented puts you in a vulnerable state, especially when your access to finances is limited. It is unjust to implement such policies when these students simply intend to practice their basic human right to education.

Financial Challenges

Federal policies like the IIRIRA of 1996 discourage states from providing financial assistance to undocumented immigrant students. Subsequently, undocumented immigrant students are not eligible for federal loans regardless of their income. It is impossible for undocumented immigrant students to be able to afford higher education when tuition rates are steadily increasing with not much change in income rates, especially for low-income students. Moreover, most undocumented families assume their children are simply not eligible for any financial aid. These families have been denied almost everything, from health care to driver's licenses. Since they generally lack access to information about college because of their low social capital, undocumented immigrant students might not even think about pursuing higher education.

Scholarships are another source of financial aid for many low-income students. Like state and federal loans, most of these scholarships require citizenship/residency; however, there are a select few available for undocumented immigrant students, such as The Dream U.S. Opportunity Scholarship. Unfortunately, there are so many undocumented students and too few available scholarships. This hyper-competitive situation is yet another reason for an undocumented immigrant student not to even consider college as an option. Furthermore, most undocumented immigrant students cannot attend college even after receiving financial aid. The need to contribute to their families' income is another major barrier to college, as well as the fact that in addition to tuition they still have to pay for housing, books and transportation.

Many of the above circumstances apply to native-born low-income students as well, and they do tread a similar path. The difference is, again, legal status. U.S.-born students can legally work; they get paid minimum wage, have more available employment opportunities, and can access work-study or funded internships. Undocumented immigrant students are not eligible for work-study or internships. When they are able to find employment, undocumented students and families can expect to earn less due to increased exploitation by employers. They will make half of what low-income US citizens will make.

Academic Challenges

Undocumented immigrant students face yet another disadvantage. Like other low-income students, they have to compete with better informed and prepared students for a chance at an undergraduate degree. The inability to academically prepare for college is due to many factors, such as attending a low-performing K-12 school, being a first-generation student, and having a low family income.

Because of their generally low-income status, most undocumented immigrant children attend public schools in poor neighborhoods. The education standards at these schools are greatly affected by low budgets, lack of well-trained teachers, and overloaded class sizes. While the circumstances are the same for U.S.-born low-income students, a lack of college preparation has a drastic effect on undocumented immigrants with higher education ambitions. Almost all scholarships available to undocumented students hold a very high academic performance standard, so these students' chances of getting into college are reduced due to poor academic training. There is huge intersectionality between social class and undocumented students' scholarly performance. They work long hours prior to and post college admission, experiencing sleep deprivation and constant stress due to their financial needs. They have impossibly overbooked schedules, often juggling multiple jobs while attending school.

Being a first-generation student comes with many challenges, such as lack of access to quality mentoring, knowledge of how to approach the college application process, and familiarity with college environments. When these barriers are added to all other barriers that undocumented immigrant students face, these students usually withdraw completely from the idea of attending college—or, if they manage to make it to college, they soon drop out due to the lack of meaningful support available to them on most college campuses.

What Can Be Done

To greatly lessen the challenges faced by undocumented immigrant students striving to both access higher education and successfully attain a college degree, there should be a fundamental change at both the policy level and social level. The implementation of policies such as the *D.R.E.A.M.* Act could not only help undocumented immigrants access higher education, but could also have a positive impact on U.S. poverty rates. The United States is not the only or the first country to admit immigrants. Nor is it the only country that faces illegal immigration challenges—but it is probably the country with the most restrictive immigration policies, and displays an especially inhuman attitude towards immigrants.

Other countries, such as Germany, have realized the moral importance and economic advantages of providing education to undocumented immigrants. This has resulted in reformed policies that benefit everyone. Germany's Free Guest Students Program is an example of such a policy. Since 2015, undocumented immigrants and asylum seekers in Germany have had the opportunity to attend college under this program. An asylum seeker is permitted to take courses and attend lectures at universities while their asylum application is being processed. Once the application is completed and, under the circumstantial acceptance of legal residency, they can continue as degree-seeking students. In most countries, the asylum-seeking process can take up to 5 years; this policy enables immigrants to learn the German language more quickly, as well as preparing them for a potential degree. Courses taken as asylum-seekers provide students with a set of skills and knowledge that can affect their lives forever, even without an official degree. German Universities are both advocating for and exercising one of the basic human rights: the right to access education regardless of your legal status (The International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, Article 13). By the time these immigrants are German citizens, they have already been equipped with language and professional skills, which enhances the German economy by reducing illiteracy and increasing the number of skilled professionals.

The Free Guest Students program would not have been possible without the efforts of ordinary people; 'College directors, professors, students and volunteers' effort led to creation of this program' (German Newspaper 2016). No policy change is possible without change at the social level. The challenges faced by undocumented immigrant students can be reduced, even eliminated, by small changes in our communities through educating school/college counselors, professors, teachers, and administrators about their needs. Trainings should be provided to enable these professionals and their skill sets, skills that are necessary to aid the success of undocumented immigrants' students. It is important that other groups of students on college campuses be educated as well in order to increase their personal understanding and combat anti-immigrant assumptions, for human fear the unknown. By increasing awareness of the struggles undocumented immigrant students face, hopefully more people will be encouraged to support policy reforms that allow these students to access college, and thrive once there.

Maya Khavary is a non-traditional student majoring in International Affairs. She grew up in Afghanistan, experiencing war, violence, conflict, discrimination and genocide. Maya is very passionate about social justice. 'I immigrated to the United States in 2016, hoping to start a new life in a country I didn't know much about,' she recalls. 'I have worked and volunteered with organizations focused on issues such as sex trafficking, war and immigration, in Afghanistan, India and the U.S.' Maya speaks five languages, and hopes to work with people from all walks of life in different parts of the world who struggle with social justice challenges.

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