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***The Undocumented Americans*. Cornejo Villavicencio, Karla. Penguin Random House LLC. 2021. pp. 185 pages. ISBN 9780399592683. \$12.35 (Hard cover)**

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The Undocumented Americans written by Karla Cornejo Villavicencio, a DACAmented writer and one of the first undocumented immigrants to graduate from Harvard, explores the narratives of the hidden lives and deeply personal stories of a variety of people living and subsisting in the United States under an undocumented status that significantly affects and permeates all aspects of their everyday lives. The book is dedicated to a specific person or group of people and their interwoven stories of life, work, health, their challenges, and struggles living in a country that rejects their existence while benefiting and profiteering from their work.

Cornejo Villavicencio's writing serves as a counternarrative against the usual trope of immigrants living off social security programs and welfare queens. Through her narrative, she tells the intimate stories of hardworking women going about their lives in the liminal spaces afforded by their citizenship statuses and the realities of everyday hyphenated identities of mothers, wives, workers, sisters, and daughters.

This book is not a traditional nonfiction work; this is the result of her lived experiences and reflections as an undocumented Latina student, birthed from an essay for *The Daily Beast*. For this book, Cornejo Villavicencio wrote anonymously in her senior year as an undergraduate student at Harvard, before DACA, crafting a story and her pull to incorporate the voices and stories of people from different circumstances that had a shared commonality living and working in the United States as undocumented human beings.

The author reflects on her earlier conflicting emotions and dislike about her identity as a professional writer and not wanting to be solely associated with a part of her identity as an undocumented student. Cornejo Villavicencio's raw honesty shows when she is declaring her writing manifesto of sorts: "I didn't want my first book to be a rueful tale about being a sickly Victorian orphan with tuberculosis who didn't have a social security number, which is what the agents wanted" (p. xiv).

Cornejo Villavicencio delves into her family story about coming to the U.S. from Guatemala and El Salvador. While enrolled in a Catholic school in New York, she benefited from the patronage of wealthy billionairess from upstate New York that had heard of her from the school's bursar and paid her tuition, as long as she maintained good grades. She proceeds to reflect how during her studies at Harvard, she perceived herself as an artist being on the receiving end of funding for her studies from older wealthy people. "It was patronage. They were Gertrude Stein, and I was a young Hemingway. I was Van Gogh, crazy and broken. I truly did not have any racial anxieties about this, thank god. That kind of thing could really fuck a kid up" (p.6).

Cornejo Villavicencio then submerges into her work providing a harrowing narrative of the undocumented workers called to action by the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001, and the extreme conditions of the rescue workers subcontracted to work on the recovery operations on the aftermath of the attack. Paloma's narrative offers the reader a poignant view of the of 9/11 worker experience, and the continued onslaught on their health both mentally and physically, while enduring the ongoing injustices and barriers brought from the Victim Compensation Fund and its shortcomings.

In continuing the stories, Cornejo Villavicencio engages in another exercise of awareness about her personal views, coming to terms with her constructed identity dealing with the model student-child undocumented persona and the realities of her encounters with families that are victims of parental deportation. By centering the stories of people deported or facing deportation, the author brings a detailed account of the different deportation processes the undocumented population encounters and how the ever-present realities and terrors of being deported shape and shift their entire lives. Moreover, the reader encounters a reflective narrative around age and the undocumented workforce. By exploring her own family realities with an undocumented aging father, the author is able to deepen the audience's understanding of the many challenges undocumented elders face, including lack of access to pensions, dignified retirement, and proper healthcare resources to care for them. Cornejo Villavicencio brings awareness to the fragile conditions while bringing to light the abuses and dangers faced by the aging undocumented population. Ultimately, this particular situation brings another unique set of challenges undocumented families and individuals must face given the precarious working

conditions and the fragility of their economic power since they largely are dependent of the products of their manual labor.

Undocumented Americans by Karla Cornejo Villavicencio is a compelling book of honest, painful, narrated histories and engaging personal reflections by an author who looks to shed a light on the everyday lives of the undocumented people living in the United States. Without romanticizing the stories or looking to softening those portraits, Cornejo Villavicencio serves a powerful and compelling narrative that strives to bring the reader into the unflinching shortcomings of a deficient—to say the least—immigration system while counteracting the otherizing nativist and xenophobic discourses of undocumented immigrants that are so pervasive and still so currently damaging to the lives of many, given the longstanding racist and anti-immigrant political and cultural climate in the United States. This book contributes to the scholarship on immigration, and particularly the undocumented immigration, from a brown body and brown voice perspective in all its profound intimacy and unflinching frankness. As the author writes so eloquently at the end of the introduction, “this book is for everybody who wants to step away from the buzzwords in immigration, the talking heads, the kids in graduation caps and gowns, and read about the people underground. Not heroes. Randoms. People. Characters” (p. xvii), and I could not agree more.