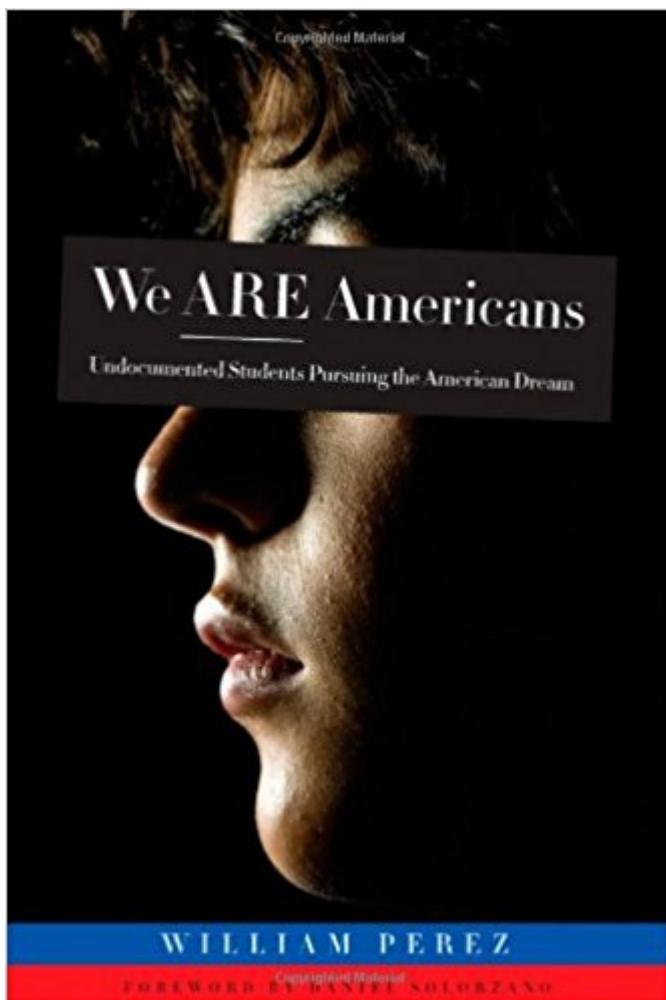


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# We Are Americans: Undocumented Students Pursuing The American Dream



## Synopsis

Winner of the CEP Mildred Garcia Award for Exemplary ScholarshipAbout 2.4 million children and young adults under 24 years of age are undocumented. Brought by their parents to the US as minors—many before they had reached their teens—they account for about one-sixth of the total undocumented population. Illegal through no fault of their own, some 65,000 undocumented students graduate from the nation's high schools each year. They cannot get a legal job, and face enormous barriers trying to enter college to better themselves—and yet America is the only country they know and, for many, English is the only language they speak. What future do they have? Why are we not capitalizing, as a nation, on this pool of talent that has so much to contribute? What should we be doing?Through the inspiring stories of 16 students—from seniors in high school to graduate students—William Perez gives voice to the estimated 2.4 million undocumented students in the United States, and draws attention to their plight. These stories reveal how—despite financial hardship, the unpredictability of living with the daily threat of deportation, restrictions of all sorts, and often in the face of discrimination by their teachers—so many are not just persisting in the American educational system, but achieving academically, and moreover often participating in service to their local communities. Perez reveals what drives these young people, and the visions they have for contributing to the country they call home.Through these stories, this book draws attention to these students' predicament, to stimulate the debate about putting right a wrong not of their making, and to motivate more people to call for legislation, like the stalled Dream Act, that would offer undocumented students who participate in the economy and civil life a path to citizenship. Perez goes beyond this to discuss the social and policy issues of immigration reform. He dispels myths about illegal immigrants' supposed drain on state and federal resources, providing authoritative evidence to the contrary. He cogently makes the case—on economic, social, and constitutional and moral grounds—for more flexible policies towards undocumented immigrants. If today's immigrants, like those of past generations, are a positive force for our society, how much truer is that where undocumented students are concerned?

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Starred Review. Perez, a developmental psychologist and professor in Southern California, plumbs the stories of students living with the constant threat of deportation for an answer to the question, "What does it mean to be an American?" Raised in this country by parents who gained access illegally, the 16 high school, college and post-graduate students profiled here (standing in for 65,000 nationwide) have each embraced our language, culture and collective dream, but are denied pathways to success. Perez, who has worked at a variety of research institutions, including the RAND Corporation and the Stanford Institute for Higher Education Research, makes a compelling argument for changing legislation on many fronts, including bottom line economics. Vitally, he argues, undocumented students are prevented from giving back to the communities that have raised them, thus limiting the country itself. No matter what one's position is on legalizing immigrants, this collection of inspiring, heartbreaking stories puts a number of unforgettable faces to the issue, making it impossible to defend any one side in easy terms or generalities. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Ã¢ "We Are Americans is a great and easy read which makes for a great contribution to the already existing conversation of humane and comprehensive immigration for all. Hopefully we steer this into a more humanitarian approach and less of a political punch line for points." (Immigrant Magazine)"This is a short introduction to undocumented students in the US. Perez records case histories from interviews with undocumented students, who continue to live a precarious future in a country that does not welcome them. These honest, heartrending biographical stories are the bulk of the book. Perez includes questions for discussion to facilitate group study and a brief three-page index. The introduction is informative and provides background on how these students come to live in the US without citizenship; changing demographics, including economic contributions of

undocumented immigrants; use of public services; and crime statistics. Perez traces the laws that have affected these students, from *Plyer v. Doe* (1982) in Texas to the present. He includes statistics, e.g., "in California about 25,000 undocumented students graduate from high schools each year, yet fewer than 7,000 enroll in community colleges" and fewer still in the state university systems. He briefly gives information about statewide higher education access, in-state tuition legislation, and the DREAM Act that would extend conditional legal status to undocumented youth who meet several criteria. Perez concludes his introduction with rationales for an immigration policy that is in the national self-interest. Summing Up: Recommended" (Choice)"After reading *We ARE Americans*, I realized that keeping a young Latino group in a second-class citizen status may be the new manifest destiny. Hispanics living in the shadows ensure a population at the ready; ready to mow lawns, wash windows and work in restaurant kitchens. Perez stresses that passage of the DREAM Act would grant undocumented students equal access to scholarships and other forms of financial aid. In defense of those brought here by their parents, he says, 'It's time to do the right thing.' " (Hispanic Outlook in Higher Education)"This book should encourage us to pass new legislation, like the DREAM Act, that would help not just these young people, but our entire nation." (Fellowship Magazine)"In-depth description and numerous quotes from Perez's interviews make this book a useful resource for students and scholars of immigration and education, as well as for general readers looking for first-person stories of immigration." (Library Journal)"This fascinating look at the next generation of undocumented immigrants unpacks the complexities of the debate and puts unforgettable human faces to its subjects. Perez, a developmental psychologist and professor in Southern California, plumbs the stories of students living with the constant threat of deportation for an answer to the question, "What does it mean to be an American?" Raised in this country by parents who gained access illegally, the 16 high school, college and post-graduate students profiled here (standing in for 65,000 nationwide) have each embraced our language, culture and collective dream, but are denied pathways to success. Perez, who has worked at a variety of research institutions, including the RAND Corporation and the Standford Institute for Higher Education Research, makes a compelling argument for changing legislation on many fronts, including bottom line economics. Vitally, he argues, undocumented students are prevented from giving back to the communities that have raised them, thus limiting the country itself. No matter what one's position is on legalizing immigrants, this collection of inspiring, heartbreaking stories puts a number of unforgettable faces to the issue, making it impossible to defend any one side in easy terms or generalities. (Aug.)" (Publishers Weekly)"In the process of describing the lives of undocumented students in the United States who aspire to live the American dream of working hard

and going to college, Perez makes the powerful case that our current caste system for persons living without legal status undermines core egalitarian American ideals and violates the essence of our constitution which brings all persons under its mantle." (MarÃƒÂ-a Blanco, Executive Director, Chief Justice Earl Warren Institute on Race, Ethnicity and Diversity)"We ARE Americans begins by placing undocumented people at the center of the story and in a much-needed historical and contemporary context. Professor Perez provides the evidence to challenge the notion that undocumented people are drain on social services and makes the argument that they have contributed, and continue to contribute, significantly to our nation's economic and social well-being. Starting with Penelope, a highly motivated and tenacious high school senior and ending with Nicole, a newly minted Ph.D., Professor Perez has crafted 20 compelling portraits of resilience and survival in a social and educational world that continuously places barriers in the path of these gifted and talented scholars." (From the Foreword by Daniel Solorzano)"Professor Perez paints a portrait of undocumented students that is as inspiring as it is tragic. We ARE Americans emphasizes the need to rethink current immigration policies to be more inclusive and welcome immigrants as equal citizens who contribute to making America great." (California State Senator Gilbert Cedillo (D-Los Angeles), author of the CA Dream Act)"The stories of the undocumented students in this book represent the talented members of society that could potentially be lost if we don't act soon; and force us to rethink our current immigration policies to be more inclusive and welcoming." (Dolores Huerta, Dolores Huerta Foundation, co-founder of United Farm Workers)"The voices we hear through the pages of William Perez's book are powerful and compelling; student voices that need to be at the center of our discussions on immigration and, more specifically, on the DREAM Act. We ARE Americans reinforces that education is the surest route to empowerment, and the need for all of us to be working together to ensure that students with so much talent and determination are given the opportunity to contribute fully to this country." (James Montoya, Vice President, The College Board)

Excellent book for those considering going into higher education as a profession.

Thought provoking. A glimpse into a world I will never fully understand.

This book gave me an insight as to some very real problems facing the US regarding Education and our future. How can students excel and feel excited about school when they are being refused a "future" in this country. They feel lost and rejected before they even finish school. Our youth seem to

be more bitter than previous generations, so add to it this uncertainty and you have the makings of troubled young people instead of happy prosperous individuals and their families. A must read in order to understand the problems facing us and undocumented students.

Excellent view into the heterogeneous lives of many undocumented students. It also provides a concise overview of immigration issues and legislation.

This book was required for a class. I haven't read it yet, but it was sent on time, and in great shape, so there's no reason it shouldn't have a 5 star rating

This book is a must-read for anyone who wants to be more fully informed about those individuals who come across the southern border to the United States from Mexico to live among us in order to better themselves. This book will flesh out some of the human drama involved in such lives. Many children have grown up here in our school systems only to find themselves stuck in inexpressible ways from advancing and contributing further to our society. Any person with a conscience and any degree of compassion ought to know the stories. I personally conceptualized and started writing a story about a fourteen-year-old boy who had been born a few hundred yards on the Mexican side of the US-Mexican border as his parents escaped the hellhole they had lived in by crossing the border into the United States. In my mind, I imagined that his parents' families --- essentially his grandparents --- had been mixed up in the lower echelon of the drug cartels in Mexico. What I wanted to convey was that the family wanted to escape from the dire circumstances of their lives in Mexico. Therefore, I decided to read *We ARE Americans, Undocumented Students Pursuing the American Dream* by William Perez. Perez interviewed twenty undocumented students who live in the United States and have done so for a good chunk of their lives. Almost all of them are still undocumented aliens living in the United States without legal justification for being here under US law. Twenty is such a small sampling of the 2.4 million children and young adults under the age of twenty-four who the forward indicates now live in the United States undocumented. Four of the kids interviewed were still in high school. For example, Penelope, who was on the cusp of graduating from high school with an excellent academic record and had participated in numerous extracurricular activities, fears that she won't be able to afford college and go to the university. She came to the United States when she was nine years old. She was raised by her mother after her parents separated. Jeronimo was born in Mexico but came to the United States when he was a year old, and essentially living all of his life in the United States. Four more of the kids were in community

college --- mostly because they couldn't afford to be at the university. Eight of the kids were at the university. For example, Eduardo said he was restricted in joining clubs, participating in school events, taking on leadership roles at the university because of his status. He considers himself a typical American boy, who grew up with brothers and sisters --- three brothers and one sister --- in a regular family. Well... maybe not so regular. He grew up in a two-bedroom house with his mother, father, his three brothers, and his sister sharing the small space. The family relied heavily upon him because he was the oldest of the kids. Four of the interviewees were actually college graduates. Julia was in graduate school working to get her PhD in engineering. She came to the United States from a poor neighborhood in Mexico when she was thirteen years old. She had attended some school in Mexico, but it was in a poor school without the educational resources of the schools in the United States. It was a dangerous place for her to live. Nonetheless, both in Mexico and in the United States, she distinguished herself as a student. The stories are informative and compelling. These are the stories of twenty highly motivated and hard-working students. There are others, many others, I assume, here in the United States without documentation who do not process the motivation or inherent ability of these twenty hard-working and motivated kids. I doubt that their plights are any less compelling than are the ones told in the book, other than the fact that they are perhaps lacking in inherent ability and perhaps, therefore, the drive to succeed in school. Not only does the book contain the heartrending stories of these kids, but it also contains important facts about the composition and, to some extent, the comportment of those individuals who are here without proper documentation. Every American is affected one way or another by those who want to pursue and to live the great American dream, but who cross our borders without documentation or come here legally but then lose their legal status but don't leave. Whenever anybody makes a judgment relative to this issue, they should be fully informed. These are people. This book, in my opinion, presents a convincing case for why we need to get a better handle on immigration and in making reformations so that these youngsters, who have lived much of their lives in the United States school system, can be fully assimilated into our society as citizens. The question is, are we Americans? Those of us with citizenship --- will we step up to the plate and support those so deserving of our consideration? I hope so.

Rousing and convincing call to action on behalf of undocumented students who struggle to obtain access to higher education.

The book was well researched and written, and I appreciate the interviews with not only high school

children but those that have made it to a JC, to a uni, and on from there. What I was disappointed in was the fact that it ALL involved illegal Mexicans, I was hoping for some perspective on other races and nationalities.

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