

Shortlisted Book for the 2023-24 Book in Common

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Karla Cornejo Villavicencio

The Undocumented Americans

Date: 2020

List price: \$17 paperback

Publisher website: <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/558229/the-undocumented-americans-by-karla-cornejo-villavicencio/>

Publisher description:

NATIONAL BOOK AWARD FINALIST, Writer Karla Cornejo Villavicencio was on DACA when she decided to write about being undocumented for the first time using her own name. It was right after the election of 2016, the day she realized the story she'd tried to steer clear of was the only one she wanted to tell. So she wrote her immigration lawyer's phone number on her hand in Sharpie and embarked on a trip across the country to tell the stories of her fellow undocumented immigrants—and to find the hidden key to her own. Looking beyond the flashpoints of the border or the activism of the DREAMers, Cornejo Villavicencio explores the lives of the undocumented—and the mysteries of her own life. She finds the singular, effervescent characters across the nation often reduced in the media to political pawns or nameless laborers. The stories she tells are not deferential or naively inspirational but show the love, magic, heartbreak, insanity, and vulgarity that infuse the day-to-day lives of her subjects.

This book is shortlisted for the 2023-2024 Book in Common because

- *It is engaging to students and to a broad audience.* As a young queer author of color who was formerly on DACA, Cornejo Villavicencio writes with fierce directness about the lives of undocumented people in the US in case studies that are immanently readable and compelling to students and the wider community.
- *It has broad appeal across disciplines.* This book is vital and compact, with chapters that can be read by themselves, making the work applicable and assignable in a wide range of classes and disciplines. *The Undocumented Americans* is directly relevant to all disciplines in the Colleges of Behavioral and Social Sciences; Humanities and Fine Arts; and Communication and Education. Specific chapters on environmental hazards (including the toxic clean-up of Ground Zero and water crisis in Flint, Michigan) would be relevant to courses in the sciences and construction management, as would chapters on migrant workers and day laborers for courses in the Colleges of Business and Agriculture.
- *It is relevant and timely.* As one of the first undocumented students to graduate from Harvard, she addresses imposter syndrome, mental health struggles, and the current status of the “American Dream” from a vitally personal perspective. This work of creative non-fiction puts a human face upon poignant immigration stories. Author Quiara Alegría Hudes describes the book as “a scream and a song . . . a complex, human look at the fabric of this nation.”
- *It relates to the university mission.* Chico State is a Hispanic Serving Institution, and this book directly centers Latinx/é experiences and supports the strategic priorities of Equity, Diversity & Inclusion and Civic & Global Engagement, including to “address real-world issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion” and “create an environment committed to the active pursuit of global engagement, service, social justice, and connectedness.”