



The DREAMers: How the Undocumented Youth Movement Transformed the Immigrant Rights Debate

Walter Nicholls

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On May 17, 2010, four undocumented students occupied the Arizona office of Senator John McCain. Across the country a flurry of occupations, hunger strikes, demonstrations, and marches followed, calling for support of the DREAM Act that would allow these young people the legal right to stay in the United States. The highly public, confrontational nature of these actions marked a sharp departure from more subdued, anonymous forms of activism of years past.

The DREAMers provides the first investigation of the youth movement that has transformed the national immigration debate, from its start in the early 2000s through the present day. Walter Nicholls draws on interviews, news stories, and firsthand encounters with activists to highlight the strategies and claims that have created this now-powerful voice in American politics. Facing high levels of anti-immigrant sentiment across the country, undocumented youths sought to increase support for their cause and change the terms of debate by arguing for their unique position—as culturally integrated, long term residents and most importantly as "American" youth sharing in core American values.

Since 2010 undocumented activists have increasingly claimed their own space in the public sphere, asserting a right to recognition—a right to have rights. Ultimately, through the story of the undocumented youth movement, *The DREAMers* shows how a stigmatized group—whether immigrants or others—can gain a powerful voice in American political debate.

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