



Of Monarchs and Migrants: The Struggle for the Right to Move in the Americas

Written by Amanda-Kathleen Corr

Life had become increasingly difficult in Hidalgo, Mexico. Maria Cruz Jimenez was working as a hair stylist to support her three children, but she knew she had to go north and join her husband in Arizona. Just before September 11, 2001, she arrived in Phoenix with her son and daughters and without documentation. Frustrated by the restrictive laws prolonging her search for employment and keeping her family from living comfortably, she and her teenage children began organizing the undocumented people in her community to fight for the rights of employment and education. One of her projects has been riding the "Undocubus," the designated vehicle for the "No Papers, No Fear: Ride for Justice" campaign, across the United States to raise consciousness for undocumented rights. As tears gathered in her eyes, she told followers of the campaign, "The biggest reason for me to get on this bus is that I want to fight for our rights. And to fight for dignity for my children, my family, and myself. My biggest hope and faith in life and this trip is being able to raise my voice, and be able to reach those corners that no one has been able to reach. And let them know that we are here. We are not alone" (Jimenez).

Like the fluttering rust-colored Monarchs painted across the outside of the Undocubus, its passengers migrated across the Americas to "attend" the 2012 Democratic National Convention. On their map, someone had scrawled a graphite line from Arizona through New Mexico, Colorado, Texas, Louisiana, Alabama, Georgia, Tennessee, and a circle around North Carolina. But unlike their free and floating metamorphic counterparts, these passengers risked arrest and deportation for crossing the artificial borders that happened to be constructed under their natural path of migration. Many of the fifty men and women intermittently aboard had made a journey of similar thousand-mile distance when they traveled from their countries of origin to

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the United States. Also similar was the possibility of encountering police officers who would likely send them back to their native countries criminalized, dehumanized. But something was different in the air on the bus — no longer was there a fear of those dreadful words “I’m gonna need to see some papers.” The men and women aboard had realized that they possessed every right to travel, to search for work and a better life, and they were prepared to voice those beliefs in spite of their divergence from United States law.

On June 29th, 2012, the bus headed east from Phoenix, AZ. Beginning the journey in this Southwestern state was, in itself, an act of protest. Shortly after the controversial Arizona Senate Bill 1070 was introduced--the law that would allow police to demand documentation from someone during an encounter with the authorities, undoubtedly targeting the Latino immigrant community and institutionalizing racial profiling--a panic struck the undocumented community. Supporters of the law claim that the presentation of papers would only take place after an arrest, that is, after a person has done something at odds with the law and is thus deserving of interrogation. But it is more probable that an officer would request the papers a Latino-looking person than, say, a white-looking person, because of the fact that many undocumented people in Arizona tend to come from Mexico and other Latin American countries, due to various geographic, economic, and political circumstances. A Latino person is more likely than a non-Latino person to be undocumented in Arizona, and if an officer is going to ask for papers, he is going to ask the Latino-looking-and-possibly-undocumented person. There are exceptions to every rule, and there are probably some “colorblind” policemen, but come on. It’s simple math.

Reactions to SB 1070 have varied. Fearing arrest and deportation, many threatened *indocumentados* chose to migrate once again, fleeing to neighboring states. Others, like the passengers on the bus, remain in hotspot regions to stand for their rights and resist the discrimination. And now that the provision of paper presentation at the demand of law officials has been upheld since last June, more and more undocumented activists are standing tall. Since the “crackdown” on undocumented immigrants heightened mid-2000s, civil disobedience in the name of immigrant rights and Latino pride has increased (Engler). Young immigrants and the children of immigrants have become involved as well, especially after the DREAM Act was on the Senate Floor in 2010 and the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals bill was introduced in 2012. More and more undocumented and documented people alike are being affected, and solidarity is growing.

Continuing the trend of civil disobedience, the Undocubus riders staged demonstrations in major cities and areas experiencing an influx of undocumented immigrants on their way to North Carolina. Demonstration reached a pinnacle when No Papers, No Fear confronted Kris Kobach, the author of the “Arizona Law,” in person. On August 20th, four of the riders, Gerardo Torres, Maria Cruz Jimenez, Maria Huerta, and Jose Mangandi, attended Kobach’s testimony regarding the legality of SB 1070 before the United States Commission on Civil Rights in Birmingham, Alabama. He championed the anticipated effects of the law, while, according to Torres, “there is no one who knows the effects of immigration laws in our communities better than the undocumented immigrants” (Torres Fearless). The protestors stood and hoisted signs that read “UNDOCUMENTED,” telling their personal stories, in hopes that their audience would realize that the “criminals” to which Kobach was referring were mothers and brothers and friends working toward a better life. Torres wrote in his online journals, “What I was doing was speaking for my rights [...] I was not scared. I think the moment we rise up in public, they realize that they no longer have power” (Torres). Kobach refused to continue testifying in the presence of the activists, so they were eventually removed by security. But they continued to tell their stories to the reporters at the front of the building. And near the end of the convention, they were allowed reentry and listened to the formal testimonies of a couple of undocumented immigrants. “We at least got a corner of the table,” Torres wrote, “I hope that very soon we can be at the center of that table, at the same level as the rest” (Torres Fearless).

The No Papers, No Fear campaigners exude a spirit reminiscent of the protestors that rallied for civil rights during the months before the 1964 DNC. Black Americans rode segregated buses, called for free and fair elections counting their votes, and humane treatment beginning with an end to discrimination on the basis of skin color. Their efforts led to various legislative triumphs

in the fight for equality and continue to inspire people like undocumented immigrants to demand justice and respect. On the collective blog of the Undocubus passengers, Maria Cruz Jimenez wrote, "When I go home, I want to tell my children, and the other young people I work with about what I learned, about the strategies they used, and talk about how each of our groups have participated in civil disobedience. I'm going to tell them about how much I identified with the history of discrimination, and the history of struggle, of working with the community" (Jimenez). Much like the Freedom Riders of the Civil Rights Movement, the passengers of No Papers, No Fear have asserted their right to be treated as human beings through creativity and courage.

When the Undocubus finally reached Charlotte, they had spent three months spreading their message throughout the American South, staging various demonstrations in hopes of reaching the people most affected by immigration and the governmental backlash. A few protestors were arrested at nearly every event, only to be released and charged with the misdemeanor of blocking traffic. It is unsure of whether or not the police knew they were heading to the Convention, but uniformed and helmeted officers quickly closed in on the passengers once they made their presence known. Placing a large banner painted with the symbolic Monarch butterfly and the words "Sin papeles, sin miedo," ("No papers, no fear" in Spanish) on the road, ten of the passengers knelt beside it and called into a megaphone their demand for fair treatment as human beings in the United States. The officers did arrest ten of the protestors for impeding traffic, and soon alerted Immigration and Customs Enforcement, which decided not to proceed in their deportation. In an interview with *The Charlotte Observer*, federal authorities claimed that "ICE is focused on smart, effective immigration enforcement that prioritizes the removal of criminal aliens, recent border crossers and egregious immigration law violators, such as those who have been previously removed from the United States" (Portillo). But if law enforcement actually focused on criminals, undocumented people like Maria Cruz Jimenez and Gerardo Torres would not have suffered from such fear. The 1.4 million people that the Obama administration has deported cannot all be criminals. It would seem that the authorities are trying to muffle the cries of the Undocubus riders instead of becoming involved in a public trial that might capture the attention and sympathy of the American people. They know the protestors are right in their words and actions. And if the case that No Papers, No Fear has made for peace and equality reaches the masses, it could endanger the power of the anti-immigration rhetoric of many politicians as well as its influence on U.S. citizens with access to voting booths.

The No Papers, No Fear campaign has also shown us that the treatment of immigrants in the U.S. not only affects people from places nearer, like Mexico, but people from other continents. One of the riders, Barni Qaasim, came to the U.S. from Somalia when she was three years old. Her family traveled across Europe seeking refuge, similar to the journeys that people make northward to California and Arizona every day (Qaasim Bio). In regards to the trials that all immigrants share, she said, "I grew up in Phoenix and felt deeply hurt when I saw a white supremacist attack being launched on people who I grew up with. I think of my family members who have been forced to migrate out of Somalia and Yemen because of war, famine, and poverty. Their trek across harsh terrain to Europe and the trek across the Sonoran Desert is the same struggle - and the causes are the same: poverty, political corruption and transnational corporations" (Qaasim). And Qaasim was not the only African immigrant aboard the Undocubus. Kemi Bello and her family came from Nigeria in search of a better life. She and her family have struggled through seven years of deportation proceedings while seeking treatment for her younger sister suffering from cerebral palsy (Bello). Through protesting, blogging, and poetry, Bello tries to change the perception of immigration that many people have in the United States. On the No Papers, No Fear blog, she wrote, "There has been a very specific and narrow view perpetuated of the undocumented experience, especially that of undocumented youth. Only the undocumented community can build a narrative of undocumented people in the United States" (Bello). Thanks to Barni Qaasim and Kemi Bello, more people in the U.S. know that legislative abuse of undocumented immigrants affects not only families from Mexico and Central America, but people from around the world, searching for safety and opportunity in America.

While recent years have seen the unjust treatment of undocumented immigrants in places like Arizona, protestors and their supporters continue to focus on the Obama administration and the

possibility of a change in his deportation record. Obama campaigned in 2007 with the commitment to reform immigration, only to deport over one million undocumented people--more than the entire reign of the preceding Bush administration (Boehm). Democrats have carried on with lukewarm rhetoric regarding immigrant rights, saying that they advocate reform but failing to take significant action in favor of amnesty (due, in part, to the opposition of many Republicans). Before the recent presidential election, bus rider Gabriela Alcazar revealed her unenthusiastic hope for a change in direction from the Democratic Party, saying that "we're not here saying that we're going to vote for [Obama] or that we're going to vote for Mitt Romney. The Republicans have already chosen a side [...] And we want the Democrats to do--to pick a side. What side of history are they going to be on?" (Democracy Now). Hopefully, in light of the courageous acts of this new generation of 'freedom riders,' they will pick her side. Even more hopefully, there will be no sides, no lines, no borders someday--only a mass of land navigated freely by all of its living beings.

Regardless of whether the Obama administration reverses the recent trend of mass deportation and pressures states in favor of profiling laws (Arizona, Alabama, South Carolina, Utah, Indiana, and more) to pardon immigrants without documentation, citizens of the United States must understand that--papers or no papers--most people who have come to the U.S. have done so in search of a better life. It is important that Americans across the country support the mothers, fathers, and children that are protesting the violation of their rights as human beings to travel and seek comfort. This is cannot be discussed as an issue over legality, regulation, or citizenship any longer. Documented and undocumented people are just that--people. And people are part of the land that we have divided with towering walls and barbed wire fences. Like the Monarchs migrating toward cooler ecological breezes in the North, people are migrating to cooler economic, social, and political breezes in the United States. And they should be able to do so with or without papers, and certainly without fear.

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Can you pick the kings, queens, monarchs and royals when given the 'struggle' they faced? Test your knowledge on this history quiz to see how you do and compare your score to others. People still blame me for the death -- disappearance, I mean -- of my nephews in the Tower of London but always forget that the Holiday Inn was totally booked! The things I did for love & country - abdicated the throne for 'the woman I love' & paved the way for my niece's historically long reign. Please, just forget my Nazi phase Is it too much to ask that my wives bear sons, my priests grant me annulments & my officers find me beautiful brides? I didn't think so either, but it obviously was. Look, if the Bolsheviks had left my children alone, I'd have t If someone suggested to you that Americans should reject representative government and return to the rule of kings, you would laugh. "This is America," you would say. "In our revolution, we got rid of monarchy." And, of course, you'd be right " but only to a point. Monarchy is making a comeback " though not in the way you think. Let me explain. A king is one person. They must follow the law. That means protecting our constitutional freedoms, including our right to representative government. No more bureaucratic rule-making. And, finally, we have to do our job. We must assert our freedom " in conversation, on the web, and in the courts. We don't want to be ruled by a king " or thousands of little kings. As the Founders would have said, "No regulation without representation." In March, the American authorities arrested 29,953 migrants there, a slight drop from the previous month's total. But migration experts say April's numbers, when they are finally published, may reflect a significant decrease in migration. Shelter managers and migrants' advocates throughout the region said they had seen migrant traffic slow to a trickle in recent weeks. The Rev. Pat Murphy, director of Casa del Migrante, a shelter in the Mexican border city Tijuana, said that only about 10 people had shown up at his door in the past two weeks looking for a place to sleep " and that most had just been deported from the United States rather than traveled from the south. Latest Updates: Global Coronavirus Outbreak.