Introduction

David, an undocumented and queer—or undocuqueer—activist living in the San Francisco Bay Area, immigrated to the United States with his parents from Mexico in the 1990s. Raised in a predominantly working-class community in Southern California, he excelled in school and ranked at the top of his high school graduating class. Eager to continue his upward educational trajectory, David applied and was accepted to the state’s top public university. To help defer the high cost of attending college as an undocumented student, David first attended his local community college and then reapplied for admission to the public university to which he had been accepted a few years earlier. After being accepted to the university once more and graduating from college, David completed a prestigious fellowship examining the intersections of queer and undocumented immigrant identities and later matriculated into a PhD program in the humanities. While on the surface it may seem that David’s social mobility and educational success occurred in a largely linear fashion and that both his undocumented and queer identities played an equal role in his understanding of his own identity, this was not the case. Rather, David’s immigration status and sexual orientation held differing roles during the various phases of his life. In fact, as David described, it was through his activism and experience in college that he came to embrace his identities and put them into action as part of his social movement participation.

During David’s childhood, his immigration status was not something he discussed with his family or with others in his community: “Growing up in Southern California as an undocumented immigrant, my immigration status was not something my family or others in our community placed much attention [on].” David, his parents, and his extended family all shared a common undocumented status and thus a mutual understanding of how the status shaped the specific opportunities that were available to them. And, while David’s immigration status was not the primary factor in his life growing up, something else was: his sexual orientation.
David later relayed how, unlike his immigration status, his sexual orientation created tension in his household during his childhood given his parents’ initial opposition to his sexuality. This disagreement was significant in defining how David understood his own identity and his relationships to others around him. It was not until David applied to college, which he chose by focusing on schools that had a reputation for being “queer friendly,” that he learned about the full implications of his undocumented immigrant status: “It wasn’t until I graduated high school and applied to colleges that I realized what being undocumented meant. Coming out as a gay man predominated much of my high school and teenage years, but in college, surrounded by an undocumented and queer community, I began to think more deeply about what it meant to be both queer and undocumented.” Thus, David not only began to realize the full implications of his undocumented status as he navigated the college admissions process but also began to consider how he might be able to combine his identities both as a gay man and an undocumented immigrant. While he knew that these two identities converged for him on a daily basis in terms of how he navigated certain social and educational spaces, it was only when he matriculated at college that he developed a framework for combining the two:

[In college] I started seeing how in my own organizing and involvement with different organizations on campus that I was really dividing my identity up into these spaces. My work at the Gender Equity Resource Center meant being gay; my work as part of the Chicano Latino Student Development office meant being a person of color; and organizing in the Multicultural Immigrant Student Program meant being an immigrant. [Eventually] . . . I . . . started engaging with a lot of feminist of color thought [and] this mindset began to change. It really got me thinking and just processing what it meant to be undocumented, what it means for me to be a student of color or what it means for me to be queer. It’s something that I feel very fragmented about because I can’t find that common ground for myself that while I try to be inclusive with my identity it’s something that I still don’t know how to do.¹

By drawing from the academic frameworks he was exposed to as part of his gender and sexuality studies coursework, David learned
about the experiences of other community members—immigrant women, queer communities of color, and others—who faced similar challenges in confronting the marginalization they faced as a result of holding multiple social identities. A student activist on campus, he diligently worked to bring together discussions of queer experiences and immigrant narratives as part of the work he engaged in on campus. Following his graduation from college, David spent a year on a research fellowship working with other self-identified undocuqueer organizers to build community and engage one another, using the arts and visual culture as a mechanism for doing so. He has continued to engage in this work upon enrolling in graduate school, with a greater focus on the arts as a mechanism for social movement participation and community building.

At first glance, David’s experience may seem unique and potentially an isolated case of a high-achieving undocumented and queer activist. Yet, as I argue in this book, in their activism, undocumented immigrant youth have, as a whole, emphasized the importance of an intersectional identity. From my interviews with and observations of members of the undocumented immigrant community, I learned that for these activists, an intersectional identity—an identity informed by the various ways they self-identified and which were tied to systems of injustice and inequality—offered a critical framework from which to understand how these community members approached and conducted their activism. In light of the number of undocumented immigrant activists who, like David, identified as members of more than one marginalized community, this book asks: How do undocumented immigrant youth, a community that is criminalized under the law, utilize their multiple identities—racial, gender, legal status, and sexual orientation—and these identities’ intersections in the formation of a social movement? As the evidence presented in this book demonstrates, undocumented immigrant activists strategically employ an intersectional movement identity to counteract the legal limitations they face in organizing due to their undocumented immigrant status. In doing so, these activists simultaneously work to build coalitions with members of other similarly situated communities.
A Portrait of Undocumented Immigrant Youth

While mainstream media have depicted undocumented immigrant youth as largely a monolithic entity, this community comprises a diverse set of people and experiences. Within immigration scholarship, the term “undocumented” has been understood as referring to those individuals who do not hold formal recognition under the law. Of the approximately 11.2 million undocumented immigrants residing in the United States, 2.1 million are estimated to be youth under the age of eighteen. These youth are members of what has been termed the “1.5 generation,” or individuals who arrived in the United States at a young age and spent their adolescence in the country. Undocumented status has been vitally important to the assimilation and acculturation processes these youth undergo, as well as to their ability to make particular rights claims.

Members of the undocumented community primarily enter the United States through one of two ways: (1) with a passport and a valid visa (such as a tourist, student, or temporary work visa) or (2) without a visa and not through an official port of entry. Contrary to depictions of undocumented immigrants crossing the border on a whim and never having applied for any formal documentation status, recent estimates find that the majority of undocumented immigrants are “visa overstayers,” entering legally and then becoming undocumented at a later point. Lapsing into undocumented status may also occur when families seek to adjust their status but are unable to do so and, as a result, are issued an order of deportation. Given the lengthy wait times and the high cost of the US immigration process, many undocumented people are issued orders of deportation after living in the country for an extended period and having established family networks and social ties. While members of these two groups—those who entered with a visa and those who did not—ultimately have different legal options for adjusting their status, they are subjected to similar forms of social and political disenfranchisement.

In terms of racial/ethnic identity, research has shown that the majority of undocumented immigrants in the United States, approximately 75 percent, come from Latin America (with Mexico being the country that has sent the most undocumented immigrants to the United States). Though a smaller population, Asian undocumented migra-
tion has occurred, alongside Latinx undocumented migration, for quite some time. Making up an estimated 13 percent of the approximately 11.2 million undocumented immigrants nationally, undocumented Asian immigrants have been well represented in higher education but have gained less visibility overall as compared with their Latinx counterparts. Notably, historians have chronicled how Asian migrants were some of the first undocumented people, coming to the United States during the Chinese exclusion era (1882–1943) using false documents and claiming nonexistent family ties to strangers or entering through Latin America. Recently, in the University of California system, one of the nation’s largest public higher education systems, almost half of the undocumented students filing affidavits to pay in-state tuition come from Asia. The navigation of racial/ethnic boundaries and identities is an important axis along which undocumented people have worked to highlight the unique experiences of particular intersectional identity formations within the larger undocumented community and how undocumented status can serve as an effective identity category under which communities can mobilize.

This demographic overview provides important context for understanding the experiences of undocumented adults and youth, but their narratives can be further contextualized through an analysis of the subjective experience of being undocumented in the United States today. Scholars in history and the social sciences, particularly sociology and anthropology, have offered the concept of migrant illegality to explain the deleterious effects of undocumented status on undocumented migrants’ everyday lives. Migrant illegality is thus a concept that is vast in its ability to explain the impact of immigration status in constraining opportunities—social, educational, and otherwise. Elaborating on the term and its meaning, anthropologist Nicholas DeGenova writes: “Indeed, ‘illegalizations’—or . . . the legal production of migrant ‘illegality’—supply the foundational conditions of possibility . . . that institute an official adjustment of status for the undocumented. Every ‘illegализm’ implies the possibility of its own rectification. Once we recognize that undocumented migrations are constituted in order not to physically exclude [undocumented migrants] but instead, to socially include them under imposed conditions of enforced and protracted vulnerability, it is not difficult to fathom how migrants’ endurance of many
years of ‘illegality’ can serve as disciplinary apprenticeship in the subordination of their labor.” As DeGenova’s articulation of the term makes clear, illegality’s effects are far-reaching, with implications in the most intimate spheres of migrants’ everyday lives. As I argue in this book, while one might suspect that this form of physical and social exclusion would make life impossible, what some have referred to as social death, undocumented immigrants have organized powerful countermobilizations to resist the stigma of illegality. These countermobilizations have included significant representation from undocumented immigrant youth who occupy a unique social and legal positioning facilitating their ability to be hyperaware of the injustices they and their fellow community members face and also to be well situated to voice opposition to such oppression.

Undocumented Youth at the Forefront of the Immigrant Rights Movement

Due to their exclusion from accessing formal legal status in the United States, undocumented immigrants are considered by some to be a group of “unlikely political actors.” As the scholarly literature on migrant illegality has aptly pointed out, immigrant legal status manifests in multiple ways and has a myriad of implications for the lives of undocumented immigrants. Yet, despite these barriers, undocumented individuals have been active in movements to counteract the stigmatizing and criminalizing effects of migrant illegality. In this work scholars have examined the importance of frameworks related to the family unit, labor, religion, and education in understanding how illegality manifests and in minimizing its deleterious effects.

Undocumented immigrant youth are a key subgroup within the undocumented immigrant community. As members of the 1.5 generation, undocumented immigrant youth occupy a unique social and legal positioning, which I argue has led to their success as social movement activists and leaders. In particular, two aspects of these young people’s social and legal positioning are important in explaining their high level of participation in social movement activism: (1) their political socialization within the US education system and (2) their coming of age as beneficiaries of the US Supreme Court’s decision in Plyler v. Doe.
As members of the 1.5 generation, undocumented youth were born abroad and immigrated to the United States, often with their families, prior to adolescence. As a result, these young people have been socialized within the US education system, a system that instills familiarity with the American political system and provides a broad narrative of its use as a tool for underrepresented communities seeking access to increased rights. Such framings of the legal system as a mechanism meant to bring about social change have, in turn, shaped undocumented immigrant youth’s interest in politics and their view of the system as one that can provide a path to greater political representation.

Today’s generation of undocumented immigrant youth are also beneficiaries of *Plyler v. Doe*. As *Plyler* beneficiaries, undocumented youth have been provided access to a free, public K-12 education, an educational experience that is similar to that of their US citizen peers. Yet, upon graduation from high school, their protection as minors and individuals with access to rights largely similar to those of their US citizen peers is disrupted. Facing these newfound barriers and being familiar with a system that has worked for them in the past, many undocumented young people not only see promise in the US political system but also see participation and use of its mechanisms as rights that should be made available to them as well.

Moreover, two critical political moments have facilitated undocumented youth’s assumption of a leadership role alongside other members of the undocumented immigrant community: activism around the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act, which was first introduced in 2001, and the immigrant rights marches of May 2006. Having worked with social movement activists in Southern California, Walter Nicholls detailed in his book *The DREAMers* the emergence of a unifying undocumented immigrant youth identity, which he argued was part of active movement-building efforts involving a variety of individuals and organizations and taking advantage of niche openings in the political and legal landscape. He explained: “Undocumented youths around the country, with the assistance of immigrant rights associations, formed college campus support groups, advocacy organizations in their communities, online networks through blogs, Facebook, Twitter and so on, and national organizations. . . . Individual youth began to learn that they were not alone. They learned that there
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were hundreds and thousands of people in a very similar situation and that they were all facing common hopes, obstacles, fears and dreams.”

Similarly, working with undocumented youth in Orange County, California, sociologist Roberto G. Gonzales explained how undocumented Latinx youth, a previously largely untapped political force, mobilized to participate in the immigrant rights marches of May 2006 largely due to their previous involvement in other social movements, which led them to “turn inward and . . . take steps towards organizing for themselves [and their communities].” Thus, as Nicholls’s and Gonzales’s work demonstrates, the increasing political power of undocumented youth and the strategic ways that these young people marshaled their growing influence to fight for increased rights represent a turning point in the broader immigrant rights movement.

Scholars of undocumented immigrant youth activism have also focused on the strategies that youth developed to push their cause forward. One of the key ways this has occurred was undocumented youth’s adoption of the “coming-out” strategy, drawing on tactics employed by LGBTQ activists. “Coming out” refers to the process of disclosing one’s undocumented status, similar to the disclosure LGBTQ individuals make when sharing their sexual orientation, usually in a public manner. Another important repertoire that activists highlighted is the role of storytelling, both in person and digital, in distributing their message to a broader audience. Scholars writing on this topic have additionally discussed the role of legal status, when considered alongside other identities in an educational context, as well as the intersection of sexuality and immigrant status.

This book departs in three primary ways from this earlier research on the political activism of undocumented immigrant youth. First, while researchers have noted the multiple axes of marginalization—race, class, and gender—that youth face and their combined impact on young people’s educational experiences, this book extends the conversation into the realm of social movement activism and organizing. In doing so, it articulates the ways activists have utilized these multiple identities as assets in their social movement participation. Second, this book examines the use of intersectionality as a social movement strategy across multiple contexts—Asian undocumented, undocuqueer, and formerly undocumented activists’ participation in the contemporary immigrant
rights movement—to illustrate how intersectional identities are not relegated to a particular subset of the undocumented immigrant community but span multiple communities within the movement. Third, through the theorization of the Identity Mobilization Model, this book offers a framework to examine the political activism of groups whose identities and lived experiences have been used as a resource to contest the law’s delegitimizing effects. In the context of the immigrant rights movement, this phenomenon has been characterized by what scholars have termed “migrant illegality,” the violence of the law and the legal system, and the law’s role as a “master status” in undocumented immigrants’ daily lives.30

Highlighting the case of undocumented immigrant youth’s multiple subjectivities, this book illustrates how this previously untapped group of social movement organizers not only recognized their power but put it into practice. In doing so, the book contributes to broader conversations taking place in sociology, anthropology, education, and law regarding the impact of and operationalization of migrant illegality, the role of identity in social movement activism, and organizers’ ability to build coalitions with members of similarly situated groups. By focusing on the plight of undocumented youth, I demonstrate how these young people are, in fact, fighting for increased rights for all immigrants and the various communities with which these individuals identify. These organizers are thus developing a template for future organizing not only by undocumented immigrant youth but also by other groups that have been legally disenfranchised under the US legal system.

The Case for an Intersectional Movement Identity

Acknowledging the diverse array of experiences encompassed by the term “undocumented immigrant,” Organizing While Undocumented explains how undocumented youth, assumed by some to be an unlikely set of political actors, were and continue to be key constituents in the immigrant rights movement. This story highlights youth’s agency in the development of organizing strategies and tactics, placing attention on the community’s awareness of the law and legal system’s benefits and limitations as they work within the law to dismantle its marginalizing effects. In this process, I argue that undocumented youth have crafted
an intersectional social movement identity as an alternative to the law’s criminalizing framework that emphasizes legal status as an individual’s primary social identity.

Subjected to the federal government’s criminalization of their status and the threat of removal for participating in social movement activism, they have experiences, one could argue, that are comparable to those of other similarly situated communities in the United States and on the global stage. Yet, as members of the 1.5 generation, these youth have spent the majority of their lives in the United States and see themselves as entitled to all the rights and privileges accorded to US citizens. This book focuses on the experiences of undocumented immigrant youth who inhabit a unique social and legal position—and one of considerable political power.

In her frequently cited article “Up the Anthropologist: Perspectives Gained from Studying Up,” Laura Nader argues that anthropologists have much to contribute to understandings of power and those who hold it. While this approach is often employed to study societal elites, in Organizing While Undocumented I focus on the experiences of undocumented immigrant youth who are members of a marginalized group that has come to wield significant political power. Employing a grassroots perspective, recentering activist voices and experiences as a means of “studying up,” blurs the boundaries between the traditional idea of who holds power and the potential impact of grassroots social movement activists. Such an approach is central to an exploration of marginalized communities’ participation in social movement activism, reframing community experiences that speak to dominant legal discourse.31

Ultimately, I argue that undocumented immigrant youth represent a uniquely positioned group of activists who face grave consequences for their participation in social movement activism: removal from the state via detention and deportation. Rather than acquiesce to the law’s criminalizing effects, undocumented immigrant youth have strategically and intentionally deployed an intersectional counternarrative to reframe how they are depicted and made legible under the law. Using the framework of the Identity Mobilization Model, this book details the specific processes through which undocumented immigrant youth deploy an intersectional lens to understand immigrant activist identity, providing an overarching understanding of the macro- and micro-level processes
through which social change occurs. As a result, this book illuminates how activists have successfully exploited openings in the political opportunity structure to build coalitions with members of other similarly situated groups and communities.

Methodology

In conducting research for this book, I drew on ethnographic participant observation and fifty-one in-depth interviews conducted with undocumented immigrant activists in San Francisco, Chicago, and New York City. As discussed in the following chapter, these three cities were chosen based on their similarity in terms of proportion of residents who are undocumented and their shared status as global immigrant gateway cities. Fieldwork in San Francisco and Chicago was conducted from 2010 to 2014, with additional and follow-up interviews taking place from 2014 to 2019. I spent extended periods in the book’s third site, New York City, from 2015 to 2018, attending key public-facing events hosted by immigrant rights organizations that explored various aspects of undocumented immigrant experiences and conducting interviews with activists I met through my participation in the broader movement. To recruit participants in each city, I used a snowball sampling approach, making contacts with an initial set of activists and later asking them to refer me to others they knew who might also be interested in participating in the project. This method helped ensure that the individuals I interviewed were active in the communities and networks about which I hoped to learn. I began the snowball approach at multiple nodes within each geographic location to vary the networks to which interviewees belong.

Given the prevalence of multiple organizations in each city focusing on issues related to immigrant rights organizing, I chose to work with a variety of organizations, prioritizing those that were grassroots and led by undocumented immigrant youth. Doing so drew upon my interest in focusing on the activism of groups that centered undocumented immigrant narratives as a means of modeling self-determination rooted in community needs. Thus, the organizations from which I recruited interviewees were (1) led by undocumented immigrants; (2) regionally based (greater San Francisco Bay Area, Chicago area, or New York City area); and (3) identity-based (Asian undocumented students, undocuqueer
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communities, and undocumented youth in a particular region). This approach facilitated greater heterogeneity in terms of participant age range, the type of college or university participants attended (community college, private four-year university, and public four-year university), and the neighborhood of the city in which they resided. For further information on participants’ demographic backgrounds, see appendix A.

The research collection phase of this project also took place during a period of shifting legal contexts and climates wherein some subfederal entities were passing legislation to uphold the rights of undocumented immigrants, and others were passing legislation to curtail rights allocated to this community.33 Yet, as explain in chapter 1, all three cities in which fieldwork for this book was conducted were largely welcoming, pro-immigrant urban centers. While research for this book was conducted primarily during the period leading up to the Trump administration’s formal ending of the DACA program, the last phase overlapped with the undocumented immigrant community’s efforts to keep the program in place.34 At the time of the writing of this book, the DACA program remained ongoing, accepting applicants for renewal but not first-time applications; it continues to do so pending ongoing litigation.35

The Identity Mobilization Model

This book’s primary organizing framework, the Identity Mobilization Model, offers an innovative approach for explaining political mobilization among communities that find themselves in a vulnerable legal and political position, such as undocumented immigrants. In particular, the model explains undocumented immigrant organizers’ cultivation and use of an intersectional movement identity that recognizes their shared oppression as undocumented immigrants while also acknowledging activists’ intersectional lived realities. While this book focuses on a case study of the contemporary immigrant rights movement, I argue that it can be used to examine other instances of activism by members of similarly situated groups that are organizing in oppressive legal environments. These other groups consist of individuals whose identities are invalidated under the law and who must first establish their presence and their right to exist before making rights claims.36
Informed both by the literature and by sustained ethnographic fieldwork with undocumented immigrant activists, I developed the Identity Mobilization Model. The model consists of three strategies that undocumented persons and members of other similarly situated groups utilize to make their rights claims legible: (1) sharing histories of community struggles with other communities to form a larger collective; (2) strategically leveraging identities of community members, highlighting moments of shared, overlapping, and intersecting experiences; and (3) calling into action allies who are viewed by the state as “legitimate political actors.” For an extended discussion of the model, a diagram of its steps, and a discussion of conditions under which it applies see chapter 1, “The Identity Mobilization Model: The Strategic Utility of an Intersectional Movement Identity.” Activists can draw on strategies simultaneously and at different moments in their political campaigns. Additionally, all three groups discussed in this book—Asian undocumented, queer undocumented, and formerly undocumented individuals—engage all three strategies of the Identity Mobilization Model.

Contributing to interdisciplinary social movement literature that discusses the importance of collective identity formation for movement success, the Identity Mobilization Model explores not only how collective identity is formed but also how it is maintained and leveraged. Collective identity has been an important area of research, especially for those studying what have been referred to as “new social movements.” Describing collective identity as a set of common bonds across a group of people points to the similarity and difference that may exist among those who see themselves, for political purposes, as being part of a unified, collective identity. Sociologists Francesca Polletta and James Jasper write, “We have defined collective identity as an individual’s cognitive, moral and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice or institution.” Thus, while collective identity includes multiple sets of ties that individuals enjoy and share, there can also exist variation in how this identity is lived and experienced, or in how it operates in conjunction with other identities that activists hold.

Given that, as Polletta and Jasper have noted, collective identity can be conceived of as filling in gaps left by structural theories such as the resource mobilization and political process models, while structural mechanisms remain an important area of study, in this book I pay atten-
tion to the micro-level processes and their interaction with macro-level structures such as legal frames and norms. Addressing the challenge of studying collective identity and its impact on structural forces that affect community political mobilization, the Identity Mobilization Model examines collective identity intersectionally. In doing so, it takes up Polletta and Jasper’s challenge of relating the individual and the structural as two key terrains that activists negotiate in their mobilization of a social movement. Also, rather than solely emphasizing the necessity for movement activists to work toward the construction of an overarching identity, I illustrate how the multiple subgroups within a given movement can be an asset to achieving the movement’s goals.

These identity-based and legally grounded strategies are combined in the model to illustrate how undocumented immigrant activists counter the law’s criminalizing effects on their community while simultaneously framing this struggle as part of a broader interconnected rights struggle. As such, this challenge of exerting rights under a hostile legal regime is one that groups positioned similarly to undocumented immigrants also face. Although this study focuses primarily on undocumented communities and related groups—Asian American immigrant communities, and the LGBTQ community—this model, I argue, can also potentially be applied to other groups that experience similar legally based forms of discrimination. The model is transformative, bringing into consideration a type of politics that was previously considered, as Amalia Pallares describes, “impossible,” in that it allows activist groups to move away from an interest-group movement and reframe their organizing as concerned with larger frames of justice and inclusion in the nation-state or, in some instances, beyond the nation-state.

Overview of the Book

This book begins by introducing readers to its central theoretical contribution: the Identity Mobilization Model, which offers a three-part framework for understanding how undocumented immigrant activists use an intersectional movement identity to overcome legal and structural barriers to organizing. The model delineates three specific strategies activists have drawn upon in their organizing—(1) community knowledge-sharing practices, (2) strategic leveraging of an
intersectional identity, and (3) high-stakes allyship—to demonstrate how undocumented immigrants are able to make their rights claims legible within the mainstream political sphere. In the first chapter I also explain how the model and its steps serve as a blueprint for the book’s remaining chapters. The later chapters focus on how all three groups—Asian undocumented, undocuqueer, and formerly undocumented individuals—engage these three steps of the model.

Chapter 1 also includes an overview of the subfederal legal landscape in the three cities in which I conducted research for the book: San Francisco, Chicago, and New York. This discussion is accompanied by an overview of the history of each of the three movement subgroups whose participation in the immigrant rights movement is the focus of the book. Combined, the information serves as a road map that offers key contextual information for readers as they approach the ethnographic and interview-based chapters that follow. While these later data-driven chapters explain how these processes evolved in social movement activism, chapter 1 provides a central organizing model, informed by robust theoretical frameworks, to assist readers in understanding the full scope and impact of the organizing in which these youth have engaged.

Chapter 2 focuses on the case of Asian undocumented youth to explain community efforts to unearth the silenced history of Asian undocumented migration and to place this history in relation to current immigration debates. As part of these efforts, activists use storytelling strategies to counteract stereotypes of Asian immigrants as solely high-skilled workers and individuals who have come to the United States to attend college, noting that Asians were and continue to be affected by the issue of undocumented immigration. Asian undocumented activists also strategically draw upon their intersectional identities in Latinx organizing spaces to work alongside members of a group that is largely invoked in the national imaginary in discussions regarding undocumented immigration. Extending activists’ efforts to build on discussions of the increased representation of Asian and other non-Latinx undocumented activists in the movement, this chapter discusses the extensive efforts that Asian and Latinx undocumented organizers have undertaken to emphasize the importance of employing a broad, multiracial approach to framing undocumented immigrant identity. I conclude this chapter
with an examination of my own experience as an ally with Asian undocumented people in a high-stakes context, illustrating how sharing knowledge can lead to high-stakes allyship.

Chapter 3 focuses on the experiences of undocuqueer activists, or those who identify as both undocumented and queer. Undocuqueer activist narratives, like the narratives of Asian undocumented movement participants, illustrate the importance of a heterogeneous movement identity while emphasizing the utility of such an approach in building coalitions with members of similarly situated communities. Undocuqueer individuals in San Francisco, Chicago, and New York City who participated in this research project began their explanation of their work by drawing parallels between the “coming-out” processes that members in both communities have undergone. Activists also highlighted the differences in the function and stakes of the coming-out experience for these two communities and the unique, layered effects this poses for undocuqueer-identified individuals. Emphasizing the manner in which undocuqueer organizers have taken a critical role at the forefront of the national immigrant rights movement, this chapter discusses how undocuqueer activists have leveraged their intersectional identities to increase the visibility of queer issues in immigrant rights organizing spaces and vice versa. Finally, allyship by queer individuals who experience marginalization but are also US citizens is a topic that undocuqueer activists draw upon as they work to increase the visibility and to promote the specific needs of their community within the larger immigrant rights movement.

Profiling a group of individuals whose experiences are not often covered within the literature on undocumented migration, chapter 4 highlights the narratives of formerly undocumented individuals who have continued their involvement in the immigrant rights movement after adjusting their immigration status. By including the case of formerly undocumented individuals in discussions of undocumented immigrant activism, this chapter draws attention to the fluid, shifting nature of legal status and the continuum rather than the divide between “directly affected movement participants” and allies. In the Supreme Court’s 1982 opinion in Plyler v. Doe, the justices envisioned undocumented status as temporary, limited to a given point in an individual’s life. Through introducing the experiences of formerly undocumented individuals into the
scholarly discussions of undocumented immigration, this chapter high-
lights the lingering effects of being undocumented for individuals who 
are able to adjust their immigration status and its role in shaping their 
continued participation in the movement. Within the subgroup of for-
merly undocumented activists, chapter 4 focuses on the case of formerly 
undocumented women of color organizers. These activists’ experiences 
highlight the gendered and racialized nature of migration and ties to the 
construction of a formerly undocumented activist contingent within the 
imigrant rights movement. This chapter also points out that allyship, 
when enacted by formerly undocumented individuals, is not necessarily 
as clear-cut as it might initially seem. As such, the chapter underscores 
the need for a reconceptualization of the role of allies in identity-based 
activist movements and the potential for this untapped resource within a 
given movement. In each of these ethnographic chapters, I demonstrate 
how each subgroup makes use of the same three strategies identified in 
the Identity Mobilization Model in slightly different ways. Their com-
mon usage of these strategies speaks to the durability of the strategies 
and their centrality to this organizing.

Organizing While Undocumented concludes with an analysis of how 
the Identity Mobilization Model can speak to ongoing debates within 
the social movement literature about the importance and necessity of 
coalition building and the strategies by which it is achieved. The con-
clusion also addresses contemporary developments in the ongoing fight 
for immigrant rights as a means of understanding the movement’s fu-
ture and its promise to bring about meaningful, transformative social 
change for migrants and marginalized communities more broadly. 
Consequently, this book can be read as illuminating challenges in the 
contemporary political moment, when state-sanctioned policies target 
multiple communities, including undocumented immigrants, Muslim 
individuals, and working-class people of color. Movements for social 
justice will continue to be relevant as communities move toward the 
dismantling of oppressive power structures. To do so, they will need 
to consider the utility of a coalitionary structure to advance a cause, 
working within and going beyond the nation-state framework in the 
process. Establishing a basis from which to assert rights in this environ-
ment is key, but equally important are collaboration and coordination 
with others facing similar challenges. Asking us to consider the poten-
tial and limits of coalition-building work in a social movement context, *Organizing While Undocumented* centers the intersectional identities and experiences of community members doing the much-needed work to bridge discussions among those with power and those seeking to redistribute it.