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Snapped into Focus: Addressing the Challenges Faced by Undocumented Mexican Immigrants in the United States

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Snapped into Focus:

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"Every day I go into work I feel like I am fighting for my family."

Meet the Consultant

Jennifer (Jenn) Carrillo was born in Mexico City, Mexico, in 1990. When she was 10 years old, her parents decided to move the family to the United States. Her grandparents, who had moved to the U.S. years earlier, began the paperwork necessary to bring Jenn and her family to America as documented immigrants, intending to eventually gain U.S. citizenship. Jenn's family entered the country on July 1, 2000, with a six-month tourist visa set to expire on December 30, 2000. With no news about their application for residency, her parents decided to stay in the country as undocumented immigrants after their tourist visa expired. Thirteen years later, Jenn's parents have not yet received a response regarding their application for residency. Jenn is now married to an American citizen, has obtained legal residency and is currently in the process of applying for citizenship.



Jenn actively participating with the crowd at the Immigration Reform Rally in 2010. This was the first of many demonstrations that she would help organize with Illinois People's Action

Moral Obligation to Get Involved

After the Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act (Arizona Senate Bill 1070) was signed into law on April 23, 2010, Jenn claims that something inside her snapped. It was becoming obvious to her that Mexican immigrants were being targeted as commodities for American corporations that were benefitting both from the economic pillage of the Latin American countries and from the business opportunities involved domestically in dealing with undocumented immigrants. Jenn believes that it would be “morally irresponsible” if she did not fight against these injustices, since her own family is still suffering because of them.

Ethnographic Methods

Jenn and I worked collaboratively throughout the entire process of this research. We conducted a series of interviews, meeting in both public spaces and in her home, during which Jenn shared her entire life story with me. She also shared images and documents from her personal archives with me, including the original six-month tourist visa that her family used when they first arrived in the U.S. on July 1, 2000. In addition, I attended a fund-raising event organized by Jenn for the organization *Latinos Unidos por el Cambio*. Jenn and I worked together to conceptualize and develop methods of visually expressing the major themes present in her story.

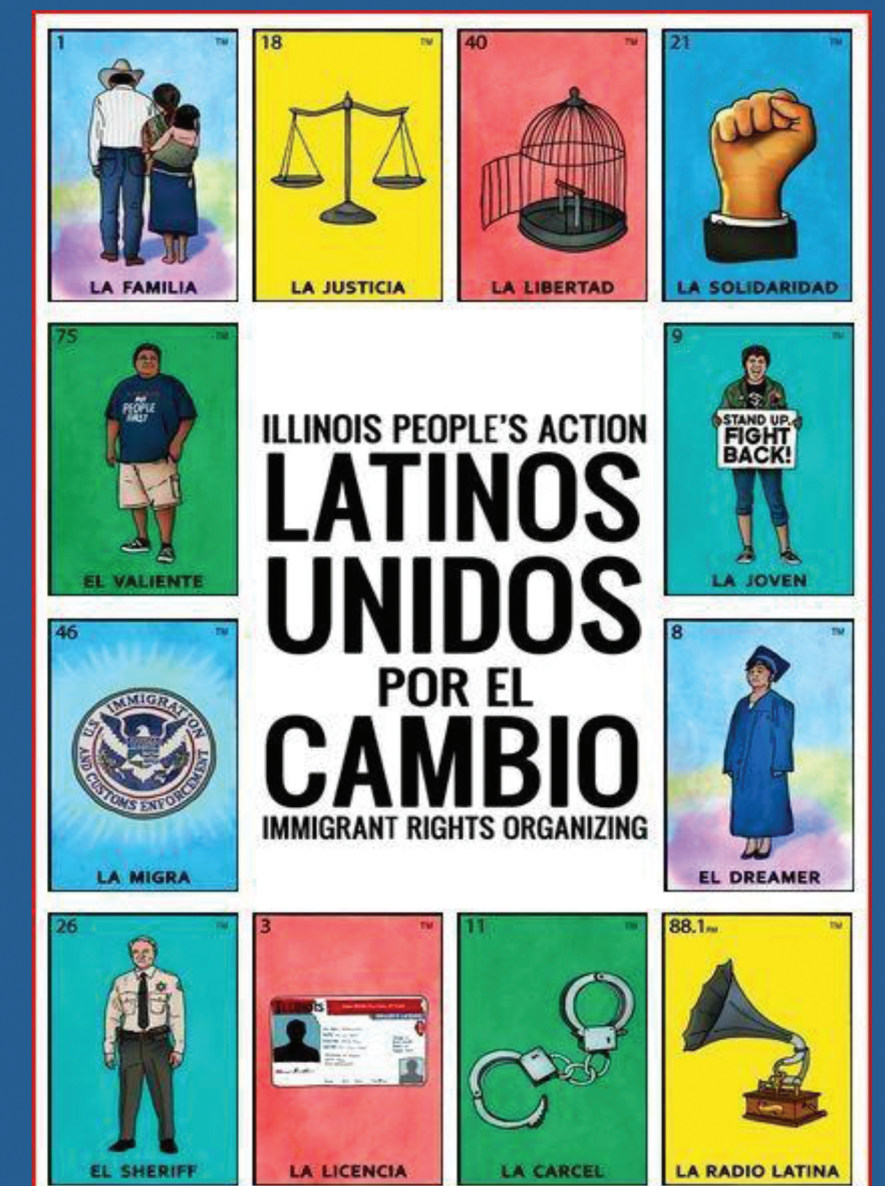


Jenn shares with me her immigration documentation, including the original six-month visa used when her family first arrived in the U.S. on July 1, 2000.

Current Legislation

The Dream Act: First introduced in 2001, this bill has yet to be passed. The most recently proposed version, voted on in 2010, advocates for granting conditional immigrant status to undocumented immigrants who: arrived in the U.S. before the age of 16; have lived in the U.S. for at least 5 years; have no criminal record; and demonstrate good moral character. This conditional immigrant status would last 10 years and would allow employment, higher education, and application for permanent residency.

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals: Passed on June 15, 2012, this memorandum requires U.S. Customs and Border Protection, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement to observe prosecutorial discretion towards individuals who came to the U.S. as undocumented immigrants as children.



Illinois People's Action

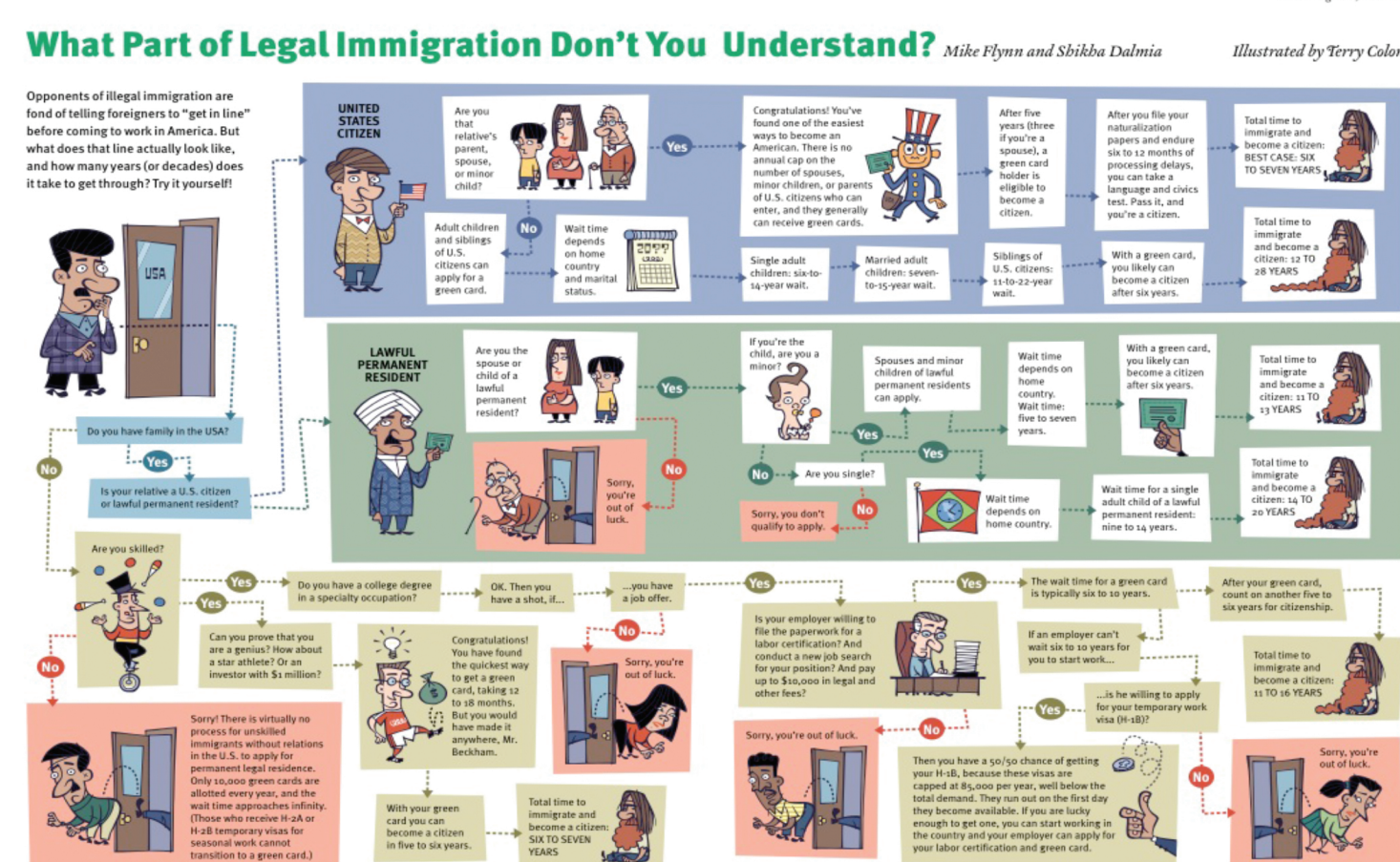
Jenn now works full-time for Illinois People's Action, the state's largest faith-based community organization, whose mission is to organize for justice in local communities. Jenn primarily works with the Latinos Unidos por el Cambio campaign, which aims to educate the Latino community on justice issues that affect them and to empower the community to address these issues on the local, state, and national levels. Through her involvement with this organization, Jenn believes she has found a successful way to integrate her Mexican self with her American self.



Jenn (center) and her Illinois People's Action co-workers at the Family Fundraiser Night sponsored by Latinos Unidos por el Cambio.

Educating the Public

Jenn uses images (such as the one featured at left) to visually demonstrate the shortcomings in United States immigration legislation. This particular image explores the difficulties associated with successfully becoming a documented immigrant in the U.S., a topic not often examined when pointing a finger at undocumented immigrants.



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