

DEFINE  
AMERICAN

Third Edition

# Telling Authentic Immigrant Stories

A Media Reference Guide



# Contents

|    |  |
|----|--|
| 3  | <b>A Letter from Define American</b>   |
| 4  | <b>Best Practices for Telling Immigrant Stories</b>                            |
| 6  | <b>Stereotypes and Language to Move Away From</b>                              |
| 8  | <b>Concepts and Terms</b>  |
| 9  | Define "Immigrant"   |
| 12 | Family   |
| 15 | Immigration Statuses and Pathways to Citizenship                               |
| 18 | Deportation  |
| 19 | Government Agencies  |
| 21 | Places Often Associated with Immigration                                       |
| 23 | <b>Insights</b>  |
| 24 | Fact Check   |
| 26 | DACA   |
| 28 | Race and Ethnicity   |
| 31 | Criminalization  |
| 33 | History of Immigration Law 101: A Timeline                                     |
| 36 | <b>Developing and Producing Thoughtful Unscripted Content About Immigrants</b> |
| 38 | <b>The Define American Immigrant Representation Scale</b>                      |
| 39 | <b>Index</b>   |
| 40 | <b>About and Contact</b>   |

# A Letter from Define American

Stories are a prism through which we view the world. They can reflect or refract reality. From research conducted by our team at Define American, we know that when people connect with nuanced, humanized, immigrant characters on screens, stages, and pages, they better understand immigrants and their experiences. But when immigrant characters are reduced to stereotypes, people often develop inaccurate perceptions.

Media—film, television, books, theatre, YouTube, TikTok, etc.—offers us a canvas on which to illustrate vivid, authentic, and complex representations of immigrants, and to build a culture of belonging. Media can also, however, reinforce harmful narratives that fuel xenophobia and harm immigrants in the real world. At a time when immigrants, regardless of status, are continuously and increasingly vilified, it's vital that immigrants are represented in their full humanity.

The latest **United States Census** estimates that more than 45 million immigrants call America home, **11 million** of whom are undocumented. Contrary to popular belief, **immigrants from Asia, not Latin America, are the fastest-growing immigrant group in the nation. One in every 10 Black Americans is an immigrant.** Multiracial Americans, many of them from immigrant families, make up the fastest-growing demographic in the country. Because of immigrants, America is more diverse than ever before, and in a land of differences, stories foster connections among us.

At Define American, we believe that storytelling is the most powerful and impactful form of communication. Storytelling activates conversations, which build into narratives about immigrants. By centering people and stories, we can create conditions for policies and politics rooted in human rights.

Join us in empowering nuanced and multi-dimensional storytelling about immigrant experiences. We invite you to take a first step by exploring this guide as you build new worlds.

Sincerely,



**Jose Antonio Vargas**  
Founder and President, Define American

# Best Practices for Telling Immigrant Stories

Six Tips to Consider When Creating Projects About Immigrants

## 1 Hire more immigrants.

Immigrants deserve a seat at storytelling tables. Having talent on staff who are reflective of the material and of the world today brings diverse perspectives and authenticity to your project—especially when telling stories about communities outside of your own. Consider hiring immigrants with a variety of backgrounds because no one person can represent the nuances of an entire community.

## 2 Engage meaningfully with immigrant communities.

If writing about or producing a project about a culture or group outside of your own, it's important to speak to members of the group you are portraying, to ensure that your characters and storylines are realistic. Define American can help connect you with a community of storytellers from immigrant backgrounds.

## 3 Seek expert opinions. Consult immigrants with lived experience.

Immigration as a process is complex and evolving; it is an issue that many Americans do not fully understand. When crafting storylines about immigrants, one way to counteract misinformation is to seek out experts, including those with lived experience and those who are closely connected to the group, such as immigration lawyers, immigrant rights organizations, and experts.

## 4 Focus on universal themes and community bondedness.

Leverage universal and relatable themes to showcase how connected and shared our experiences as humans really are. Even if one has not lived in a community with immigrants, we can all relate to ideas like wanting to belong, succeed, feel free, and find love. Nuanced and humanizing depictions of immigrants can make audiences more understanding, and able to relate to people outside their own bubble.

## 5 Be sensitive to risk and privacy.

Undocumented immigrants are assuming a personal, and sometimes legal, risk when they speak to the news and entertainment media. Many choose to not disclose their immigration status, rather than risk deportation due to unwanted attention from this exposure. Keep in mind the risk that undocumented immigrants face when relating their personal journeys. Respect privacy preferences.



**Read more** about how to ethically engage undocumented storytellers in Define American's original report, *American Dreaming: The Roadmap to Resilience for Undocumented Storytellers*.



## 6 Empower immigrant characters to control their own narratives.

Oftentimes immigrants are portrayed as helpless, not having agency over the outcome of their situations, or in need of rescuing. Other characters (often white) then swoop in to save them. For example, one-fourth of immigrant characters on TV between 2020–2022 were “rescued” by a non-immigrant character. In reality, immigrants are resilient individuals with agency over their own lives.

Want to level up your immigrant characters? Check out the Define American Immigrant Representation Scale for ideas and recommendations.



## Why Do Authentic Immigrant Stories Matter?

Define American’s original research with the USC Norman Lear Center indicates that TV shows with nuanced immigrant characters and immigration storylines can shift attitudes and inspire people to real-life action. When viewers develop imagined friendships—also known as parasocial relationships—with fictional characters who are members of a marginalized community, it can foster empathy and reduce stereotyping, particularly among those who have little or no real-life contact with people from those communities.

“ Define American’s research is showing how characters like Nalini—who I play in *Never Have I Ever*—can actually help people to be more understanding toward immigrant experiences. When you invite a three-dimensional character like Nalini into your home through your TV, you certainly are inviting someone who is different from you. But instead of focusing on those differences, you start looking for the commonalities: like the challenges of raising a teenager, or empathizing over the grief in losing a loved one, or reflecting on being a single parent. Audiences are creating relationships with these characters that are then informing how they’re interacting with immigrants in real life. There is more empathy, understanding and nuance to these interactions, and that is such a powerful thing.

**Poorna Jagannathan**  
Actor, *Never Have I Ever* (Netflix)



Among *Never Have I Ever* viewers, 42% said the show increased their comfort around meeting a recent immigrant to the U.S.

# Stereotypes and Language to Move Away From

Too often, we see reductive, repetitive, and harmful portrayals of immigrants—sometimes in ways we do not realize, and even when writing with the best intentions. Below are themes and language that are overrepresented or dehumanizing.

## ✘ Immigrants as Criminals

Immigrants are far less likely than the native-born population to commit crimes and be incarcerated, but we often see immigrants portrayed committing crimes or engaging in criminal activities. According to Define American's latest research, 40% of immigrant characters on screen are associated with crime—an all-time high since we began our research.



*Law & Order* episode "Zero Tolerance" (NBC).

For a closer look at crime, check out page 31



## ✘ Fear-Based Stories

Many immigrant portrayals today are “fear-based” narratives depicting immigrants as either living in fear (of deportation or other types of discrimination) or causing fear in others (as terrorists or criminals). Move away from narratives that exploit fear, suffering, and trauma; these are already overrepresented in media. Consider centering moments of joy.

## ✘ Defining Immigrants by Immigration Status

Immigration status is not the only aspect that defines immigrants and the immigrant experience. Immigrants, like anyone, are also shaped by their interests, aspirations, joy, and love. They have a range of life experiences, hobbies, and pursuits beyond adjusting their immigration status or pursuing citizenship.

## ✘ Avoid the “Good Immigrant” Narrative

A common narrative is the myth that immigrants who are “good,” “hard-working,” and/or who “contribute to the economy” are worthy of living in the United States or accessing basic protections. Reducing people to an economic value-add, or taking away their right to be flawed, complex individuals, is dehumanizing. An immigrant character does not have to be perfect or need to overcome every form of adversity in order to have rights, worth, or dignity as a human being.

✘ **Problematic Terms**

***illegals, illegal immigrant, alien, illegal alien***

The bottom line: The term “illegal” is dehumanizing and unfairly replaces complex legal circumstances with an assumption of guilt.

According to the AP Stylebook, the leading style guide used by journalists and the news industry, “except in direct quotes essential to the story, use ‘illegal’ only to refer to an action, not a person. Illegal immigration, but not illegal immigrant.”

“Alien” is also dehumanizing. The United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) has **removed** this term from its guidelines and the Biden administration has issued guidance changing its vocabulary throughout various government agencies.

✔ **Preferred Terms**

***undocumented immigrant, unauthorized immigrant, immigrant without legal status***

“Undocumented” or “unauthorized” offer options for neutral terminology. People can also be described in detail, for example: *a native of Cameroon whose asylum application is pending. A 20-year resident of Brooklyn, originally from Mexico.* Bring forward people’s humanity whenever possible.

# Concepts and Terms

- **Define “Immigrant”**
- **Family**
- **Immigration Statuses and Pathways to Citizenship**
- **Deportation**
- **Government Agencies**
- **Places Often Associated with Immigration**

# Define “Immigrant”

Immigrants are not a monolith. They are individuals with hopes, dreams, and struggles. Some are newly arrived and may be rejoining family members they have not seen for many years. Some are in the process of applying for asylum, while others are waiting years for their day in court with an immigration judge. Some are waiting for their legal permanent resident cards to arrive. Some came to the United States as children on visas that lapsed and grew up American without documentation. And some came to this country without documentation and are still fighting for a pathway to citizenship. All immigrant experiences are unique. We encourage you to understand the various terms related to immigrants and migrants.

## Asylum Seeker or Asylee

A person applying for protection in the United States because they cannot return to their home country for fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. Unlike the refugee process, those who apply for asylum must do so from inside the United States, or present themselves to authorities at a port of entry. **The right to seek asylum is protected under the law.**

## Climate Migrant or Climate Refugee

A person forced to move from increasingly non-viable areas of their countries due to major weather events like water scarcity, crop failure, heat waves, droughts, wildfires, sea-level rise, and storm surges, **among other issues**. In 2022, **millions around the world** were uprooted from their homes and forced to flee due to climate-fuelled crises. Climate erosion in many areas can be linked to decades of exploitation of these regions, often by wealthier countries, including those to which climate migrants are fleeing.

## DACA Recipient

A subset of “Dreamers,” or undocumented youth who applied and received temporary protection from deportation through President Obama’s 2012 **Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals** policy. This status allows certain people who came to the United States as children to obtain two-year, renewable work permits and Social Security Numbers. There are an estimated 580,000 current DACA recipients as of December 2022. ([USCIS](#))

## Dreamer

The term “Dreamer” has often been used when referring to undocumented immigrants who came to the U.S. as children. Some entered the country without authorization, while others entered lawfully and became undocumented after their status lapsed.



For more about  
DACA and  
Dreamers, check  
out page 26



## Immigrant

A person who migrates to another country, usually for permanent residence. The United States is home to more than 45 million immigrants, roughly 14 percent of its population. ([U.S. Census](#))

## Migrant

A broad term for people who move to another country. Some are lawfully admitted. Some are without status. Migrants may remain on the move for extended periods of time, and some may wish to return to their birthplaces one day.

## Migrant Worker

An individual who travels seasonally for temporary work. Not all migrant workers are undocumented, and not all undocumented individuals are migrant workers.



*A Million Miles Away* chronicles the true story of Jose Hernandez, who went from being a migrant farmworker to a NASA astronaut (Prime Video).

## Non-immigrant

An individual who enters the United States with a temporary visa and does not intend to leave their home country permanently. Common examples are tourists, foreign students, and corporate executives traveling for business. The majority of non-immigrant visa holders return to their home countries. The United States admitted [96,800,000 non-immigrants in 2022](#).

## Refugee

An individual who has been forced to flee their home country because of a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. Congress gave the President authority to set a quota each year on the number of refugees to admit. Under the Trump presidency, the United States cut its refugee cap to its lowest level ever.



*His House* (Netflix).

## Undocumented

An individual who currently does not have legal status in the United States. Generally, this person came to the United States without inspection or overstayed their visa, knowingly or unknowingly. Contrary to popular belief, undocumented individuals are not eligible for federal government benefits and, for most, there is no pathway to legalize their status.



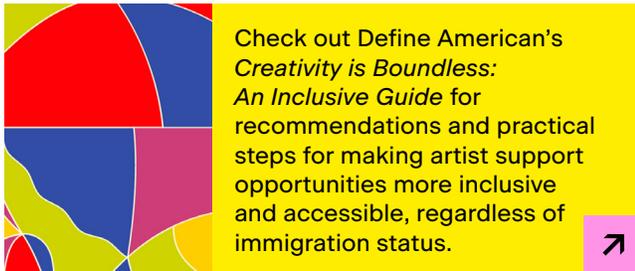
Ulises is a dancer living in New York as an undocumented immigrant in *I Am No Longer Here* (Netflix).



Lia Maivia is a businesswoman and *The Rock's* undocumented grandmother in *Young Rock* (NBC).

## Undocuqueer

Refers to the intersection of the undocumented and LGBTQ+ struggles, to give voice to those living in both worlds and embracing both identities. ([Northern Illinois University](#))



Check out Define American's *Creativity is Boundless: An Inclusive Guide* for recommendations and practical steps for making artist support opportunities more inclusive and accessible, regardless of immigration status. [↗](#)

## On Assimilation

Assimilation implies that immigrants should give up their customs and culture to conform to white North American norms, and not always willingly. Sometimes the arbiters of what it means to be an “American” impose assimilation on people as a condition for being the “right” kind of citizen. Integration or inclusion are more humanizing terms, which means embracing the culture that immigrants bring while also allowing them to blend into and help shape a diverse reality that is the United States.

# Family

## Family-based Migration or Family Reunification

In the United States, family reunification provisions were first enacted in 1921. Since 1952 specifically, family-based immigrant visas have been the primary way people come to the United States legally. The Trump administration and nativist groups refer to family-based migration using the derogatory term “chain migration” to incite fear. **Preferred term: Family-based migration.**

Under U.S. legal code, “family” is narrowly defined as children, parents, siblings, spouses, and fiancées. Grandparents, aunts, uncles, godparents, etc. are not included in the narrow legal definition of family. Government agencies don’t have discretion to make exceptions, no matter how close you might feel to your grandmother.

In order to help a family member immigrate, you must be either a U.S. citizen, green card holder (permanent resident), refugee admitted within the past two years, or asylee granted asylum within the past two years. (USCIS)



## Family Separation

A cruel effort to deter further migration, family separation is the process by which parents were systematically separated from their children at the U.S.-Mexico border under the Trump administration’s “zero tolerance” policy, implemented in April 2018 but reportedly **piloted as early as 2017**. Family separation caused a record number of children to be detained in children-only facilities while their parents were sent elsewhere. Over 5,000 children were separated from their parents with no process for reuniting them. Some parents were ultimately deported without their children. Some families have since been reunited, **yet hundreds of minor children are still separated from their parents.**

## Marriage and the “Marriage Miracle” Narrative Trope

Nearly 1.7 million U.S. citizens have a spouse who is undocumented. More than half have been married for 10 years or longer, while roughly a quarter have been married for **20 years or longer**. Marriage to a citizen or permanent resident does not guarantee a path to citizenship, yet it has been misrepresented as an “easy” and direct solution to legalization. In reality, there are restrictions which can include the requirement of a legal method of entry into the country. Additionally, the spouse of a citizen can also be deported.



## Mixed-Status Family

**More than 22 million people** in the United States live in mixed-status households, where at least one undocumented person lives with U.S. citizens, green card holders, or other immigrants who have lawful temporary status. Nearly five million U.S. citizen children have at least one undocumented parent.

But having a child in the U.S. doesn't guarantee the parent any right to remain. U.S. citizen children cannot sponsor a parent until the child is 21 years old; even then, there are usually legal barriers to the parent qualifying for status.



Warner Bros. Pictures' *Blue Beetle* heavily features the Reyes, a Mexican-American family of mixed-status.

## Transnational Adoption or Intercountry Adoption

Transnational adoption is the process by which a child is adopted from outside of the United States and brought here to live permanently with their parent(s). Transnational adoptees are not automatically granted citizenship. Between **25,000 and 49,000 people** who were adopted by American parents as children live in fear of deportation because they never got citizenship—often the result of failure to fill out a form at the time of adoption.

## Additional Reading

"My wish for this holiday season is to bring my son home: Susan Gray"



"Waiting in No Man's Land"



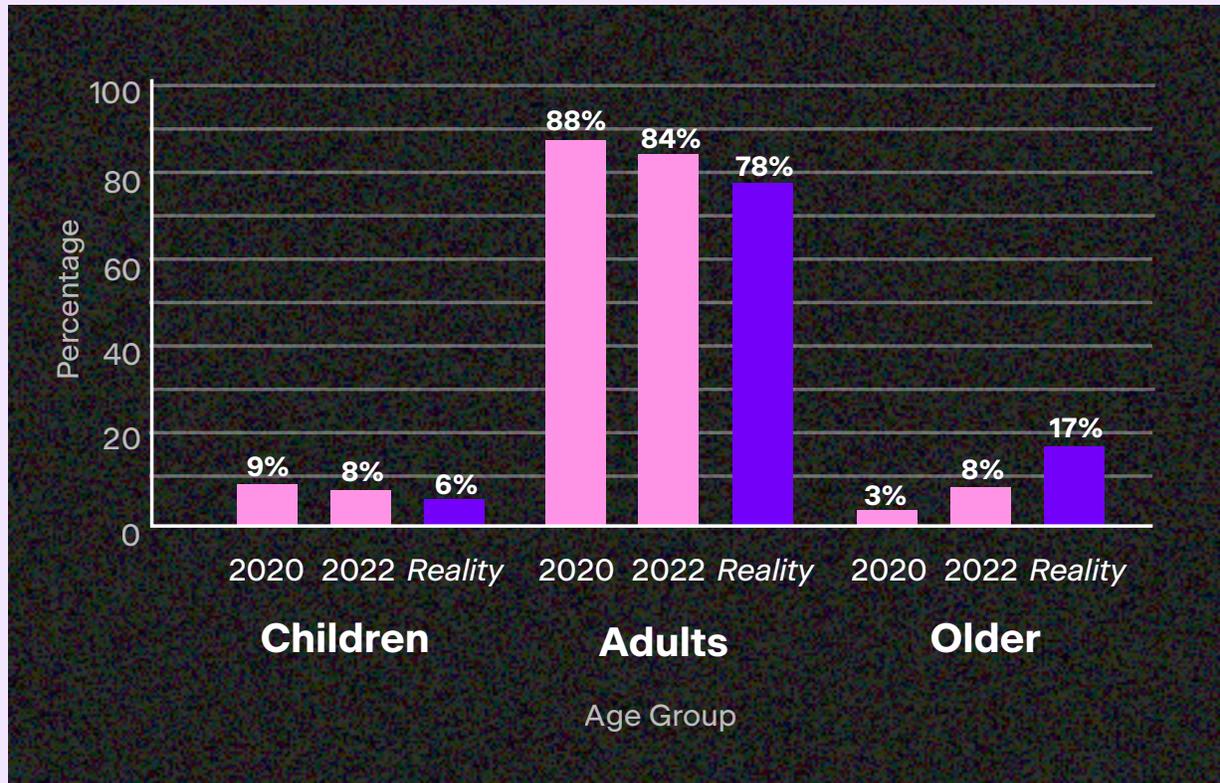
"Actor Diane Guerrero Talks Family Separation Firsthand"



# Age

**Did you know?** Older immigrant characters (age 65 or older) are underrepresented on scripted television. In reality, 17% of U.S. immigrants (nearly one in six) belong to this group. There are unique consequences to “growing old while immigrant.” Consider opportunities to create characters who reflect this generation on screen.

## Representation by Age of Immigrant Characters on Television



*(Note: 2020 and 2022 percentages represent immigrant characters, while “Reality” percentages the represent U.S. immigrant population)*

### Further Reading

"New Older Immigrants in the U.S.: Challenges, Coping, and Intervention Strategies"



"The Particular Loneliness Facing Undocumented Older Immigrants"



# Immigration Statuses and Pathways to Citizenship

For the overwhelming majority of undocumented Americans, there is no pathway to U.S. citizenship under current immigration law. Yet there is a wide misconception that one can easily "apply," "take a test," or "get in line" to gain legal status in the United States, acquire lawful permanent residency status, and become a citizen. In fact, immigration laws make it quite difficult for a person to qualify to immigrate to the United States, which is the initial step toward citizenship. For undocumented people in the U.S., the road to adjust their immigration status is long, convoluted, and quite plainly often doesn't exist. If you are developing an immigrant character, here are some of the terms and statuses that you might want to consider incorporating.

## Asylum

A status granted by an immigration judge because a person cannot or is unwilling to return to their home country for fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. Past persecution on these grounds can also be a basis for asylum. These people meet the definition of a "refugee." But unlike the refugee process, those seeking asylum can only do so while physically on U.S. soil.

## Green Card or Lawful Permanent Resident Card

A green card is an informal name for a lawful permanent resident card, which allows immigrants to live and work permanently in the United States. Not all "green cards" are green. In years past, "green cards" have been pink or blue.



Alba Villanueva receives her green card during Christmas in *Jane the Virgin* (The CW).

## H-1B Classification

A program that allows U.S. employers to hire skilled foreign workers into specialty occupations, often in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

**65,000 H-1B visas are administered per year via randomized lottery**, and an additional 20,000 are given to foreign professionals who graduate with a Master's degree or Doctorate from a U.S. university. Unlike many other non-immigrant or temporary worker visas, H-1B visas are "dual intent" visas, meaning a person with an H-1B visa is eligible to apply for permanent residence after meeting certain requirements. Despite meeting the eligibility criteria, permanent residency is never guaranteed.

## Naturalization

The process of being granted U.S. citizenship after meeting the requirements established by Congress in the Immigration and Nationality Act. Individuals age 18 or older must answer a number of questions about U.S. history and laws, and demonstrate they can speak English. The citizenship process culminates in an oath ceremony. The **United States Citizenship and Immigration Services** is the agency that processes these applications. (**USCIS**)

There are some exceptions to the tests if you are disabled or elderly. If parents naturalize before their children turn 18, those children can be naturalized with the parents without any additional formal process or testing, if certain conditions are met. But for the majority of people, the citizenship process is expensive, complicated, and time-consuming. And, the naturalization process is not open to most undocumented immigrants, because a person must be a lawful permanent resident first.



In a storyline that spans multiple seasons, Alba finally becomes a citizen in *Jane the Virgin* (The CW).



Jaime and his friends celebrate him becoming a US Citizen by having a party on a boat in *Broad City* (Comedy Central).

## Special Immigrant Juvenile (SIJ) Visa

For children who can prove they were neglected, abandoned, or abused by a parent in another country, and that it is not in their best interests to return to their country of origin. The Immigration and Nationality Act requires that the individual be under 21 and unmarried.

## T Visa

A visa designated for certain victims of severe human trafficking and their immediate relatives, allowing them to remain and work temporarily in the U.S. up to four years. They may eventually apply for permanent residency.

## U Visa

A visa for victims of certain violent crimes in the United States who have suffered demonstrable abuse and cooperate with law enforcement in investigating said criminal activity. Many undocumented victims are afraid to report crime due to fear of deportation, and not having valid evidence of the crime. The number of U Visas available is small, so this solution is not common.



## Temporary Designations

### Temporary Protected Status (TPS)

Temporary Protected Status does not provide a pathway to citizenship. It is a temporary status allowing a person to live and work in the United States for a limited period of time. People may be granted TPS if their country of origin has been designated by the Secretary of Homeland Security as a place where conditions, such as war and natural disasters, prevent them from safely returning temporarily.

### O-1 Visa

The O-1 non-immigrant visa is for an individual who possesses extraordinary ability in the sciences, arts, education, business, or athletics, or who has a demonstrated record of extraordinary achievement in the motion picture or television industry and been recognized nationally or internationally for those achievements. (USCIS) The O-1 visa is temporary, but it is also “dual intent” and those who are eligible also have a pathway to apply for a green card.

# Deportation

Deportation storylines often lean into harmful, fear-based narratives depicting immigrants as either living in fear (of deportation) or inciting fear in others.

A common misconception is that deportation is only pursued when criminal laws have been violated. In fact, immigration cases are designated as civil proceedings, not criminal ones. While the last three presidential administrations differed in their immigration policies and rhetoric, all have been deeply invested in deportation—**with 893,000 occurring per year, on average**—uprooting individuals from their lives and leaving behind spouses, children, homes, careers, and lives.

## Deportation

Deportation occurs when the federal government orders the removal of an individual from the United States. If an immigrant is required to appear before an immigration judge in a hearing, the federal government is mandated to notify them. Some reasons for deportation include but are not limited to: a person losing an appeal in immigration court; failing to prove they had grounds for asylum or other forms of relief to stay in the country; or simply missing their court date (which is complicated by the fact that there are limited procedural protections to ensure that the person has actual or adequate notice of their hearing date and time). Additionally, there is no provision or guarantee of legal counsel in immigration cases, even if the individual is detained or is an unaccompanied child.

## Detainee

A person who is taken into custody by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officers. This is a civil form of detention, not a criminal one. Congress mandates that a limited set of individuals be detained (for example, those who have been convicted of particularly serious criminal offenses). However, the vast majority of people detained by ICE fall outside of the mandatory detention category. ICE also has discretionary detention authority, and it is worth noting that **over 66% of individuals detained by ICE have no criminal record.**



Haitian American teen Tyrell learns his mother has been detained on *A Million Little Things* (ABC).

## Family Expedited Removal Management (FERM)

A new process for family units apprehended at the southwest border who are processed for expedited removal and indicate an intention to apply for asylum, or express a fear of persecution or torture. **This process will place a GPS ankle monitor** (also referred to as “alternatives to detention”) on certain heads of household for continuous monitoring, and subject them to a curfew.

# Government Agencies

If your storyline includes one of the various government agencies related to immigration, first understand each of their functions and activities. Misunderstanding and misrepresenting these agencies can cause misinformation about how they treat immigrants in real life. So, who's who? Know the difference.

## Department of Justice, Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR)

EOIR is an agency within the Department of Justice that adjudicates immigration cases. EOIR judges decide whether a non-citizen may be removed or deported from the United States, or allowed to stay and become a legal permanent resident.

## Department of Homeland Security (DHS)

The Department of Homeland Security is the third largest cabinet department within the U.S. government. It was established in 2011 in response to the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. The agency oversees more than 62,000 federal law enforcement officers, by far the largest of any single federal agency. While DHS was intended to “protect the American homeland” and oversee anti-terrorism, immigration, cybersecurity, election integrity, and disaster management, the department continues to grapple with thousands of accusations of misconduct and abuse, ranging from “performing forced hysterectomies on detained immigrants, deporting witnesses to systemic sexual abuse in immigration detention, and defying federal court orders to halt deportations.”

## United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)

The federal agency that oversees lawful immigration to the United States, including processing affirmative asylum, permanent residence, and naturalization applications.

## Department of Homeland Security (DHS)

### Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)

A federal law enforcement agency under DHS responsible for executing immigration laws governing border control, customs, trade, and immigration. Its key functions include prosecution of removal cases, detention, and deportation. In the wake of the Trump administration's family separation policy and other inhumane activities, several movements such as Abolish ICE, Occupy ICE, and others have publicly advocated for ICE's disbandment.



A deep look at the state of U.S. immigration, offering unprecedented access to ICE operations and moving portraits of immigrants in *Immigration Nation* (Netflix).



A Filipina undocumented immigrant, who dreams of leaving her small town in Texas to pursue her country music dreams. Her plan is put on hold when her mother is taken by ICE in *Yellow Rose* (Sony Pictures).



A doctor in Cambodia, where she was born, Thony struggles to make ends meet, and is forced to work as an undocumented cleaning lady in Las Vegas in *The Cleaning Lady* (Fox).

### Homeland Security Investigations (HSI)

A lesser-known investigative arm of **ICE**, with operations around the world. While its "mission is to investigate, disrupt and dismantle terrorist, transnational and other criminal organizations," credible sources report that **HSI has limited accountability and often unjustly targets immigrants of color.**

### United States Customs and Border Protection (CBP)

One of the largest law enforcement organizations in the world, CBP monitors all 328 ports of entry into the United States.

### United States Border Patrol

Responsible for executing immigration laws at and around international land borders. They can arrest and detain people who cross the border without inspection and question people within a 100-mile border zone.

### Critical Incident Teams (CITs)

Teams within the U.S. Border Patrol that were responsible for handling most inquiries into agent misconduct. **After several reports of corruption, lack of accountability, and problematic behavior, the teams were disbanded in 2022.**

# Places Often Associated with Immigration

## Border Wall

The disputed 2,000+ mile barrier that exists between the United States and Mexico, and is often over sensationalized in media as a visual symbol of immigration. Stories taking place at the southern border are overrepresented. In reality, there are several different ways that immigrants arrive in the U.S.

## Constitution-Free Zone or 100-mile Border Zone

A zone within 100 miles of U.S. land and sea borders (including inside U.S. airports) where Border Patrol agents are authorized to operate immigration checkpoints at random. Two-thirds of the entire U.S. population lives within this 100-mile border zone, which includes the entire states of Florida and Maine as well as

several of the largest U.S. cities, including all of Washington DC, San Francisco, Chicago, New Orleans, and Boston. All DHS officers, including Transportation Security Administration (TSA) agents at airports, only need a “reasonable suspicion” that a crime or immigration violation is being committed in order to stop and question people at checkpoints. This can lead to undocumented immigrants being immediately detained. Every year, hundreds of people with legal status are mistakenly arrested in these zones due to the expanded powers provided to Border Patrol, including U.S. citizens, permanent residents, and people with tourist visas.

Additional Reading: "How the Supreme Court Enabled the Border Patrol's Insane 100-Mile Power Grab"



## Did You Know?

Two-thirds of the U.S. population lives within the 100-mile border zone.



## Detention Center

A facility where non-citizens are incarcerated often under inhumane conditions. As of this writing, 91 percent of people held in ICE custody are in detention facilities owned or operated by private prison corporations. **“Contracts with ICE continue to make up a significant amount of revenue for private prison corporations like the GEO Group and CoreCivic. In 2022, the GEO Group made \$1.05 billion in revenue from ICE contracts alone, or 43.9 percent of its total revenue (\$2.4 billion).”**



Characters talk at a detention center in Lionsgate's *A Better Life*.

Read more: "Biden vowed to reform immigration detention. Instead, private prisons benefited"



## Sanctuary

A location that offers temporary security, safety, and protection for undocumented immigrants. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has viewed churches, hospitals, and schools as “sensitive locations” where they do not conduct enforcement actions such as arrests—**although they do not always honor the policy and there are several reports of violations.**

Read more: "Four immigrants who sought sanctuary in churches no longer face deportation"



## Sanctuary City

While there is no legal definition for "sanctuary city," the term typically refers to a municipality where local law enforcement do not ask for, or disclose, the immigration status of people they come into contact with. The idea is that local resources are generally allocated to solving local challenges, and the federal government cannot compel local jurisdictions to take part in federal immigration enforcement (**American Immigration Council**). Strategies that localities employ vary between jurisdictions. Research has repeatedly found that sanctuary cities promote trust and are often safer and more economically vibrant than non-sanctuary cities.

## "Anti-Sanctuary" States or Cities

"Anti-sanctuary" states or cities refer to **jurisdictions** that have agreed to cooperate with the federal government in enforcing federal immigration law. Some anti-sanctuary states penalize "sanctuary cities" located within their jurisdictions.

# Insights

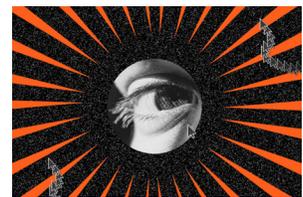
- **Fact Check**
- **DACA**
- **Race and Ethnicity**
- **Criminalization**
- **History of Immigration  
Law 101: A Timeline**

# Fact Check

Immigrants and immigration can often be used as political pawns in divisive campaign rhetoric. Here are some timely issues you may have come across in the news, and the facts you need to know about them.

## What is “The Great Replacement”?

- Demographic changes in the United States are happening. The Great Replacement Theory incites fear by claiming that demographic shifts are part of an intentional and widespread conspiracy to “replace” the white population with people of color. This fear has dire consequences, particularly for immigrants and people of color. In 2019, both the shootings in Christchurch, New Zealand, killing 51, and at a Walmart in El Paso, Texas, killing 21, were inspired by the Great Replacement Theory.
- In reality, “without immigration, the white population in the U.S. would have declined last year...” Since the start of the pandemic in April 2020, the white population has grown by 391,000 people, all of it driven by immigration.”
- The Great Replacement Theory also incites fear about immigrants destroying the economy and over-taxing the nations' resources. In fact, immigration contributes a great deal to the U.S. economy, not to mention the myriad collective benefits that a more inclusive and diverse population add to our shared culture and progress.



For more on our work studying the Great Replacement online, check out Define American's original research, *Immigration Will Destroy Us & Other Talking Points*



## What is birthright citizenship?

The right of any person born in the United States to American citizenship, as established by the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Birthright citizenship may also be acquired by being born abroad to at least one U.S. citizen parent. Some lawmakers have been very vocal about their desire to take this right away from children born in the United States to immigrant parents.

Further reading: "Trump vows to end birthright citizenship for children of immigrants in US illegally"



Further reading: "Matt Gaetz's attempt to ban birthright citizenship is dangerous"



## What happened to Title 42?

Implemented by President Trump, Title 42 was an order conceived as an emergency health authority that the administration used to carry out its restrictionist immigration goals. It allowed U.S. officials to turn away migrants who came to the U.S.-Mexico border—even those legally seeking asylum—on the grounds of preventing the spread of COVID-19. The Biden administration lifted Title 42 restrictions in May 2023, but also created more challenging asylum rules.

Further reading: "Title 42 has ended. Here's what it did, and how U.S. immigration policy is changing"



## Are immigrants coming here to steal U.S. jobs?

- A commonly-held misconception is that immigrants come to the U.S. to take job opportunities from native-born citizens. In reality, there are several factors that cause people to emigrate: war, natural disasters, gender inequality, political corruption, and better lives for their children.
- Those who do emigrate often fill unique positions in the U.S. workforce by procuring in-demand jobs, and become part of the fabric of American society.

## Further Reading

"Immigration slowed in COVID-19 pandemic, but migrant jobs not filled by U.S.-born"



"America's farms are desperate for labor. Foreign workers bring relief and controversy"



"The Growing Demand for Healthcare Workers in Tennessee"  
| American Immigration Council



"The Contributions of Immigrant Nurses in the U.S. During the COVID-19 Pandemic"



# DACA

What you need to know

## What is DACA?

- Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) is a program that allows young people who came to the United States as children and who meet a certain criteria to receive temporary protection from deportation and access to work permits. Importantly, DACA is not a pathway to citizenship.
- Since its inception in 2012, DACA has allowed roughly 800,000 young people to enroll in school, become gainfully employed, and enlist in the United States military.
- DACA recipients have also been able to acquire driver's licenses in many states; with their Social Security Numbers they have been able to pay taxes, get better-paying jobs, pursue higher education with newfound eligibility for in-state tuition in certain states, open bank accounts, have financial credit, and buy homes. Some have become eligible to travel abroad by meeting specific requirements through a travel permit called Advance Parole.
- **DACA does not provide a pathway to citizenship**, nor does it confer legal status or enable Dreamers or their families to obtain lawful permanent residency. Immigrants protected under DACA cannot simply “apply,” “take a test,” or “get in line” to become a citizen, despite having lived in the United States for most of their lives.



## TV's First Lead Character with DACA

Did you know? The main protagonist of Disney+'s *National Treasure: Edge of History*, Jess Valenzuela, is the first lead character to have DACA in a television series. Define American worked closely with the creators and their writer's room to help shape Jess' character and storylines, as well as how she navigates everyday life as a Dreamer.

## Where does DACA stand now?

A lot has happened since the last publication of this guide. In October 2022, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals upheld a ruling that DACA is unlawful. In June 2023, the case was argued yet again in front of the U.S. District Judge Andrew Hanen—the Texas judge who ruled it illegal and on September 13, 2023, he again ruled that DACA is unlawful. This ruling has been appealed and will be heard by the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals sometime in 2024 and the decision will likely be appealed to the Supreme Court. It is not certain whether the Supreme Court will choose to review the case. As of this writing, and as a result of ongoing litigation, new applications for DACA are not currently being processed and the program remains in a state of limbo, allowing only current DACA holders to continue renewing.

## Who are “Dreamers”?

The term “Dreamer” (sometimes stylized “DREAMer”) refers to undocumented immigrants who arrived in the United States as children or teenagers. The term comes from the acronym for the legislation: the **D**evelopment, **R**elief, and **E**ducation for **A**lien **M**inors Act. The DREAM act was first introduced in Congress in 2001, and there have been eleven versions of it, all of which have failed to be signed into legislation. Of the more than two million Dreamers living in the United States, only 580,000 have temporary protected status under DACA. Deferred action is an exercise of prosecutorial discretion to defer deportation against DACA recipients, an authority that has long been exercised by the federal government.

| ✘ DACA Recipients CANNOT  | ✔ DACA Recipients CAN   |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Become legal permanent residents or U.S. citizens through the DACA program.</li><li>▪ Leave the country without advance permission.</li><li>▪ Vote.</li><li>▪ Receive certain federal benefits, like college financial aid and food stamps.</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Get a temporary stay (pause) of deportation for two years at a time.</li><li>▪ Apply for <b><u>employment authorization</u></b>.</li><li>▪ Apply for driver’s licenses in <b><u>several states</u></b>. The licenses are clearly marked that they cannot be used for federal purposes, like voting.</li><li>▪ Pay federal income taxes, medicaid/medicare, social security tax, state taxes, and others. In fact, they are required to do so.</li><li>▪ Apply for a <b><u>Social Security Number</u></b>.</li><li>▪ Apply for in-state tuition in <b><u>certain states</u></b>, although this is in jeopardy.</li></ul> |

# Race and Ethnicity

More than 33 million Americans—about one in 10—identify as being of two or more races, a number that grew by nearly 25 million people in the past decade, according to the **2020 Census**. Immigrant communities are incredibly diverse, yet there are disparities in immigrant character representation on television compared to the real world. When developing immigrant characters, ask yourself: Does this character reflect the diversity of immigrants living in U.S. communities?

- Representation of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) immigrant characters on television has more than doubled since 2020, but Pacific Islander (or Pasifika) representation is lacking, and often erased from broader AAPI discourse.
- There are twice as many Black immigrant characters on television in 2023 than there were in 2020.
- Representation of Latine immigrant characters has plummeted since 2020. This is on par with broader representation of all Latine leads, co-leads, showrunners, directors, and executives in entertainment, which is also lagging behind the nation’s demographics. ([U.S. Gov’t Accountability Office, Latino Donor Collective](#))
- While Middle Eastern/North African (MENA) immigrants are overrepresented on television, their portrayals often lean into harmful stereotypes as terrorists or suspicious characters, amplifying fear-based immigrant narratives.

“ I really feel strongly that there should be more of us and there should be more of us working and telling stories.

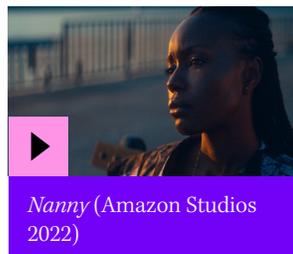
**Dana Ledoux Miller**

Samoan writer, producer, and co-founder of Pasifika Entertainment Advancement Komiti (PEAK)

“ We have so many Latino legends in our history, and it’s time the world sees who we are, how diverse we are and what we’ve accomplished. We’re a part of the American narrative.

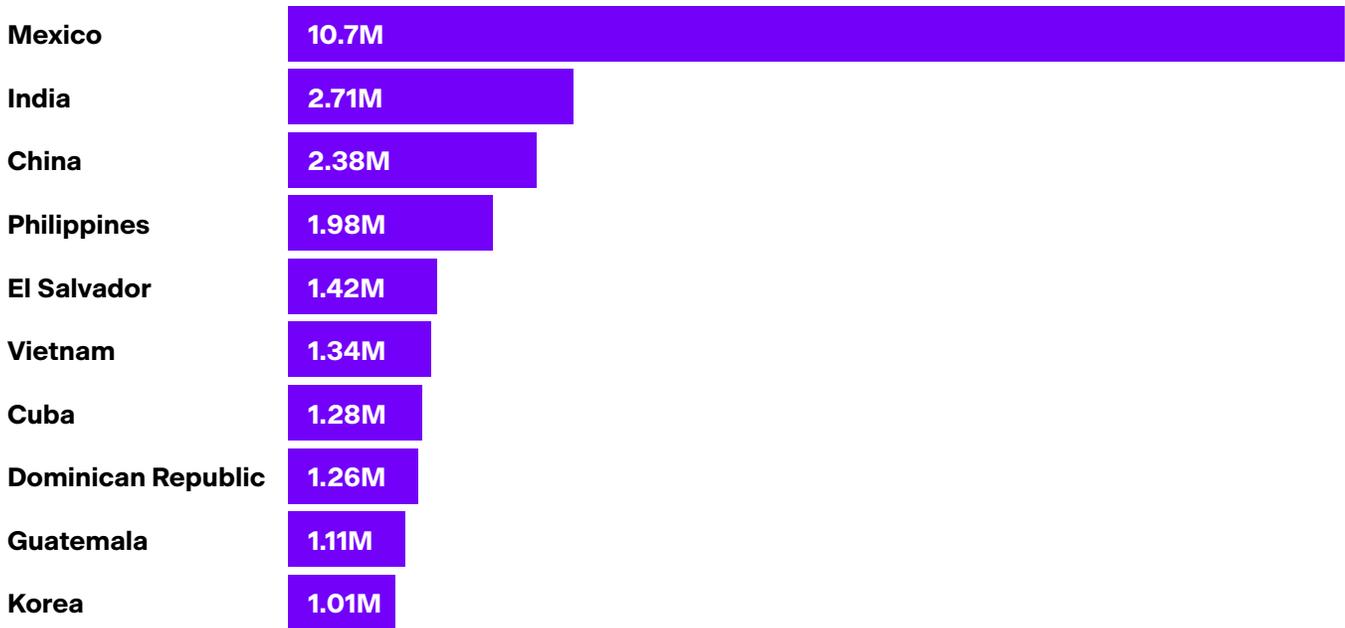
**Brenda Victoria Castillo**

President and CEO of National Hispanic Media Coalition

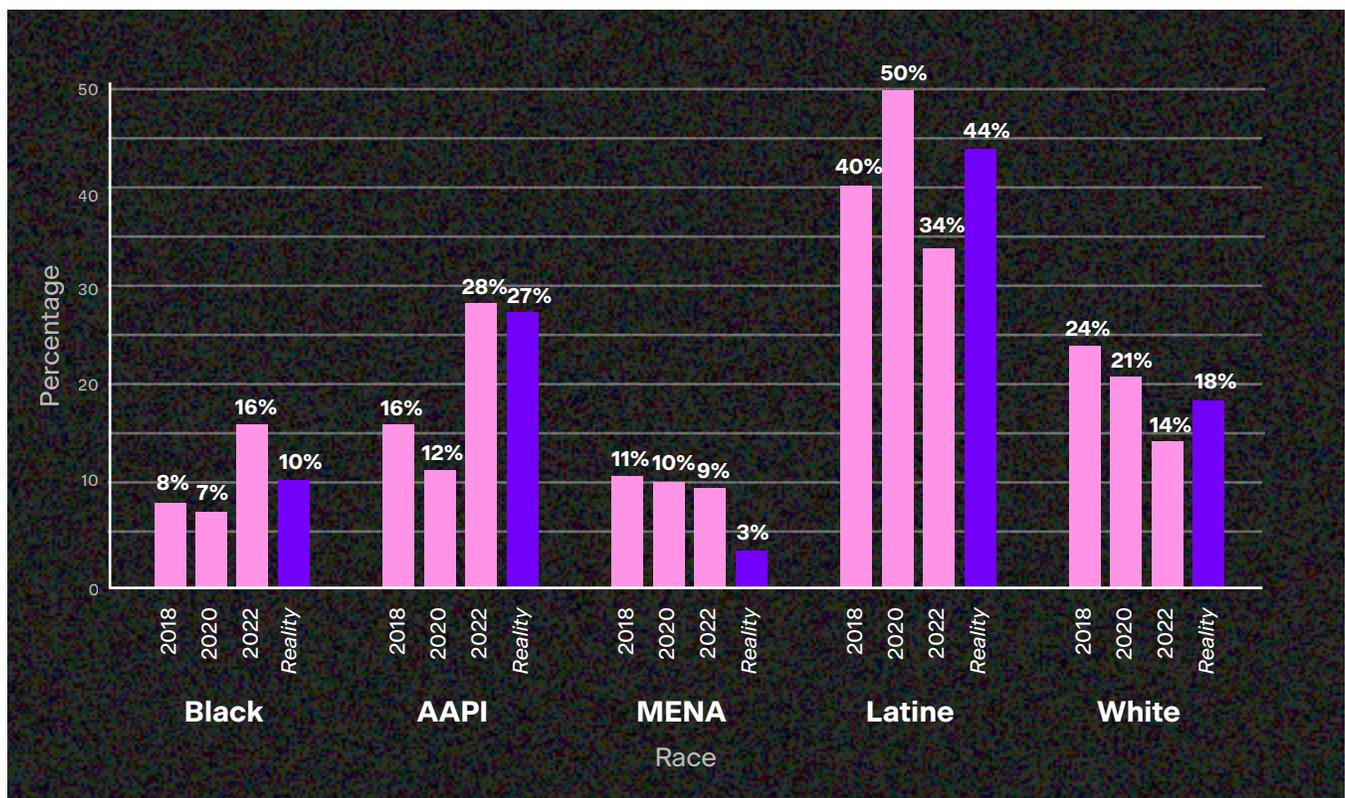


## Immigrants' Top Countries of Origin in the United States

Mexicans make up the largest group of immigrants in the US, according to the [Migration Policy Institute](#). The top countries of origin include these Latin American and Asian nations:

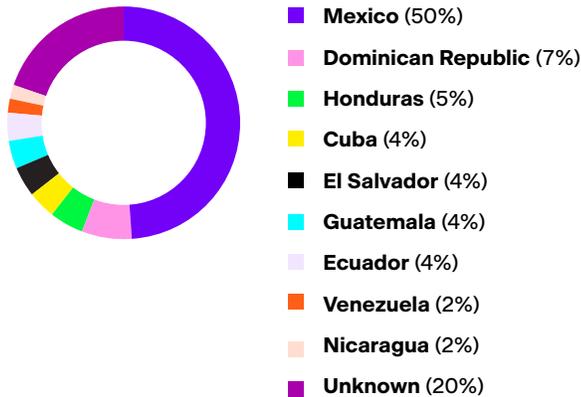


## Immigrant Representation on Television



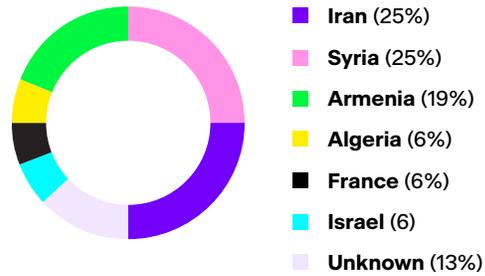
## Country of Origin of Latine Immigrant Characters

Percentages are rounded and might not add up to 100%.



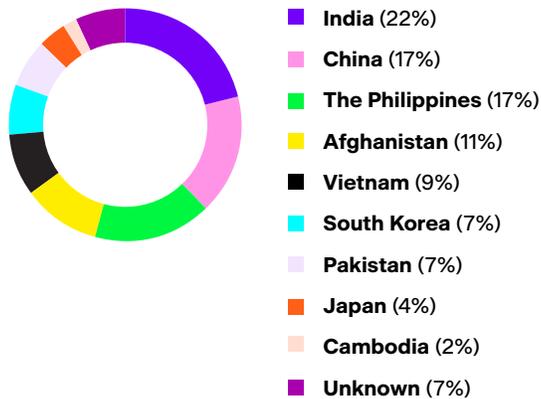
## Country of Origin of MENA Immigrant Characters

Percentages are rounded and might not add up to 100%.



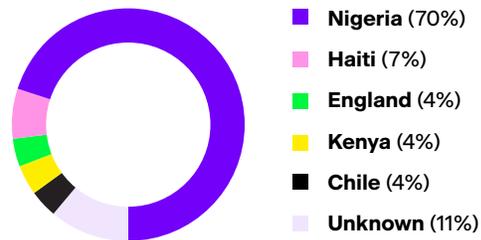
## Country of Origin of AAPI Immigrant Characters

Percentages are rounded and might not add up to 100%.



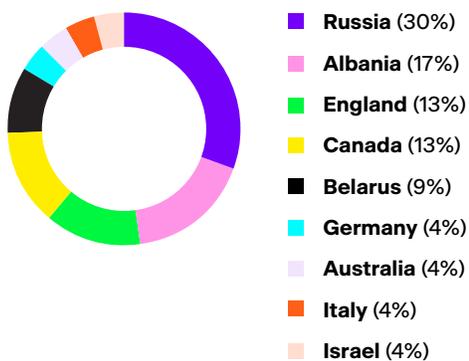
## Country of Origin of Black Immigrant Characters

Percentages are rounded and might not add up to 100%.



## Country of Origin of White Immigrant Characters

Percentages are rounded and might not add up to 100%.



# Criminalization

In 2022, Define American's original research with USC's Norman Lear Center revealed a shocking statistic: 40 percent of all immigrant characters on television were associated with crime, an all-time high since 2018.

The criminalization of immigrants is a dangerous trend. Immigrants are far less likely to commit crimes than the native-born population. Yet, viewers are often inundated with narratives depicting immigrants as criminals, and false storylines. **Linking immigrant characters to criminality fosters inaccurate perceptions of immigrants in the U.S. today and perpetuates otherization, which ultimately influences how immigrants are treated in real life.**

## *Produced in Partnership with the American Immigration Council*

The American Immigration Council works to strengthen America by shaping how America thinks about and acts towards immigrants and immigration and by working toward a more fair and just immigration system that opens its doors to those in need of protection and unleashes the energy and skills that immigrants bring.

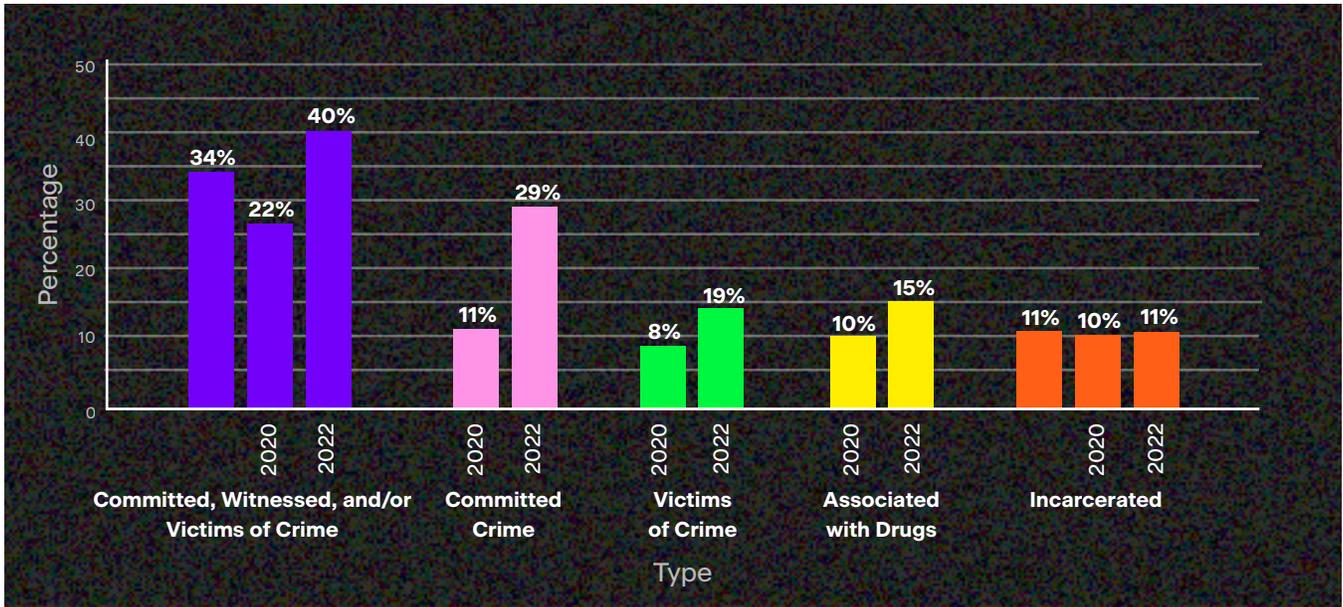
## What We See

- Six times as many immigrant characters were featured in crime shows and procedurals in 2022, compared to 2020.
- Criminalization of immigrants is at an all time high. 40 percent of all immigrant characters were associated with crime.
- 11 percent of immigrant characters were incarcerated in the past or presently, which is consistent with what we saw in 2020.

## The Reality

- Higher Levels of Immigration are Associated with Lower Crime Rates
  - Researchers from the University of Buffalo found that as the relative size of foreign-born population increases, the rate of violent crime, murder, and robbery decrease.
- Immigrants are Less Likely Than the Native-Born to Engage in Criminal Behavior
  - Native-born U.S. citizens are more than twice as likely to be arrested for violent crimes as immigrants, 2.5 times more likely to be arrested for drug crimes, and over four times more likely to be arrested for property crimes.
- Immigrants are Less Likely to Be Incarcerated Than U.S.-born People
  - Immigrants are 30 percent less likely to be incarcerated than U.S.-born white people, and 60 percent less likely to be incarcerated than U.S.-born Black people.

## Immigrant Characters Associated With Crime



Watch: A group of undocumented Filipino immigrants are rescued by the S.W.A.T. squad after being blackmailed into a drug smuggling operation in *S.W.A.T.* (CBS).



McCoy (Sam Waterston) and Price (Hugh Dancy) encourage Maroun (Odelya Halevi) to ask an undocumented immigrant to testify in *Law & Order* (NBC).

# History of Immigration Law 101: A Timeline

Are you tackling a period piece or flashback sequence? Wondering which immigration laws passed when? Here are some key dates.

- 
- 1790 **Nationality Act of 1790**  
This was the first law to establish standards and procedures by which immigrants became U.S. citizens. This was a "whites only" law that limited access to U.S. citizenship to people from western European countries.
- 1875 **The Page Act**  
This law barred immigrants entering the United States for "lewd and immoral" purposes. Although the text of the law is neutral, the law was intended to target and exclude Chinese women. It was therefore the first anti-Asian immigration law.
- 1882 **Chinese Exclusion Act**  
This law targeted Chinese immigrants for restriction—the first group explicitly identified by race and class for severely limited legal entry and ineligibility for citizenship.
- 1882 **Immigration Act of 1882**  
Expanded the ranks of excludable immigrants to include people considered "convicts," "lunatics," and "likely to become a public charge."
- 1917 **Immigration Act of 1917**  
In passing the Immigration Act of 1917, Congress extended the Chinese Exclusion Act to most Asians by designating an "Asiatic Barred Zone" and banning most Asians from immigrating to the United States. People from Japan were the only nationals allowed to continue immigrating.

1924

### **Immigration Act of 1924 (Johnson-Reed Act)**

To further limit immigration, this law established extended "national origins" quotas, a highly restrictive and quantitatively discriminatory system, and banned immigrants who are racially not allowed to become naturalized citizens. The quota system would remain the primary means of determining immigrants' admissibility to the United States until 1965. The racial restriction on citizenship remained in place until 1952 (with exceptions for some Asian groups beginning in the 1940s).

1948

### **Displaced Persons Act of 1948**

U.S. Congress enacts the "Displaced Persons Act of 1948" following the admission of more than 250,000 displaced Europeans from World War II. Technical cut-off dates precluded the issuance of visas to 90 percent of the displaced Jews who entered Germany, Austria and Italy.

1952

### **Immigration and Nationality Act (INA)**

Congress passed the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), which repealed racial restrictions on naturalization.

1965

### **Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 (Hart-Celler Act)**

The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 (Hart-Celler Act) set the main principles for immigration regulation that are still enforced today. It applied a system of preferences for family reunification (75 percent), employment (20 percent), and refugees (five percent) and for the first time capped immigration from within the Americas.

1980

### **Refugee Act of 1980**

Congress passed the Refugee Act of 1980 which codified international protections into U.S. law.

1996

### **Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (IIRIRA)**

Allowed for legal immigrants (including green card holders) to be deported if convicted of certain crimes. Established 10-year reentry bars for undocumented people, making it impossible for many to leave the U.S. and return through legal channels to adjust their status. After IIRIRA, immigration enforcement activities and deportations skyrocketed.

2002

### **Department of Homeland Security (DHS)**

Following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the Department of Homeland Security was created. This eliminated the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) and divided it into agencies including U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

2002-  
2016

### Deportations Dramatically Rise

Deportations under President George W. Bush rose. This continued during Barack Obama's presidency, earning him the moniker "Deporter in Chief" because his administration deported more than 3.2 million people. Congress raised the allowable number of immigrants detained to 47,000 people a night. In total, approximately 400,000 people are detained by ICE every year.

2012

### Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) was first implemented, allowing hundreds of thousands of young people who have called the United States home since childhood to receive temporary protection from deportation.

For more about DACA and Dreamers, check out page 26



2017-  
2020

### Muslim Ban, Family Separation, and Remain in Mexico

President Donald Trump, and his senior advisor Stephen Miller, radically restricted legal and illegal immigration with more than 400 policy changes. Most notable: three Muslim bans masked as "travel bans"; a policy of "zero tolerance" for asylum seekers at the southern border, which resulted in separating families in an attempt to deter people from arriving, the Remain in Mexico program (Migrant Protection Protocols or MPP); and Title 42.

For more about Title 42, check out page 25



2021

### Biden Administration

President Joe Biden began overturning some of Trump's immigration policies.

2022-  
present

### DACA Under Threat

DACA, and the lives of hundreds of thousands of young immigrants protected under the policy, remain under threat. On June 1, 2023, Judge Hanen of the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Texas heard arguments for the DACA case, Texas v. United States, again. As of the publishing of this guide, no final decision has been given over the lawfulness of DACA, and no new applications are being processed. Those who have DACA are able to continue renewing it although for how much longer, remains uncertain.

Source: [immigrationhistory.org](https://immigrationhistory.org)

# Developing and Producing Thoughtful Unscripted Content About Immigrants

Whether it's a hard-hitting documentary or your favorite reality television show, unscripted programming is an immensely popular and enthralling form of narrative. Because unscripted programming is “reality,” it can be easy for creatives and storytellers to assume this format is incapable of **perpetuating harmful tropes**, or producing content that could be damaging to marginalized communities. But these programs aren't always simply capturing what's in front of them. They have the potential to capitalize on trauma, alienate entire communities, and bolster stereotypes and myths about immigrant experiences.

To ensure you're producing and developing thoughtful, humanizing, and accurate stories that champion immigrant experiences, ask yourself:

## Are you exploring, or exploiting?

Before the camera rolls, keep in mind these best practices and tips for your unscripted immigrant-focused documentary or reality series:

- When working with an immigrant cast or subject, find ways to celebrate their identity and culture. For example, this can be done through food, learning how to make a meal, or participating in a holiday tradition. During the interview process, prompt questions that highlight the uniqueness, richness, and pride in their backgrounds.
- Be mindful of highlighting stories that further perpetuate harmful stereotypes and tropes, such as the “Good Immigrant” narrative, fear-based stories, and criminality.

Check out [Stereotypes and Language to Avoid](#) on page 6



- Immigrants come from diverse and intersectional communities. During the development process, look for stories and individuals that reflect this vibrancy.

Check out [Race and Ethnicity](#) on page 28



- Research the community before entering and documenting it. Have a historical understanding of the community and be mindful of using language or dialogue that could be perceived as a pejorative.
- During the casting or interview process, be sensitive to triggering or retraumatizing your subjects for the sake of a “good” story. Let your subject tell their own story. Allow them agency and ownership over their own experience and feelings.
- Be mindful of othering and using an immigrant’s heritage or background to manipulate drama or comedy. Do not satirize food, accents, or traditions simply because they are unique or different.
- If you are filming a complicated scene or conversation, a subject matter expert or cultural competency consultant can help you navigate the situation and make your subject more comfortable. Reach out to community members or organizations like Define American for research, recommendations, and thought partnership.



For deeper insights on ethically engaging immigrant storytellers in media, check out Define American’s original report, *American Dreaming: The Roadmap to Resilience for Undocumented Storytellers*.



In *Taste The Nation with Padma Lakshmi*, Padma Lakshmi sits down with comedian Yvonne Orji over a plate of traditional Nigerian cuisine, as they discuss the Nigerian community’s impact on the city of Houston, Texas (Hulu).



*Split At The Root*, a documentary that follows the journey of mothers separated from their children at the U.S. border, and a grassroots initiative that aims to reunite those families (ARRAY).



*Flee*, an Academy Award nominated documentary about Amin Nawabi, who recounts through animation, his past as a child refugee from Afghanistan (Neon).



# The Define American Immigrant Representation Scale

The Define American Immigrant Representation Scale is an assessment tool to help creators in entertainment tell more humanized, nuanced, and fully-realized stories through immigrant characters. The Scale is informed by our original research in partnership with USC's Norman Lear Center, and is inspired by characters from our TV and film consultations.

This tool and its questions intend to inspire introspective inquiry during the creative process to help creators form productive habits over time and combat harmful stereotypes through storytelling. At the same time, this tool is not a definitive test of the quality of immigrant representation on TV and in film. If there are an estimated 45 million immigrants living in this country, then there are 45 million ways of being an immigrant. Immigrant experiences are full of complexities that exist beyond the yes/no binary of these questions, and no rubric can capture that nuance completely.

If you are using the Define American Immigrant Representation Scale, we thank you for taking a step in the right direction toward depicting more authentic immigrant characters.



Use the tool and see all questions and recommendations



## The Scale

1. Is the character defined solely by their immigration status or their identification as an immigrant?
2. Is the character depicted as engaging in criminal activity or associated with a crime?
3. Does this character reflect the diversity of immigrants living in U.S. communities?
4. Does this character perpetuate the "Good Immigrant Narrative"?
5. Is the character empowered to control their own narrative?
6. Is the character's storyline defined by fear, either living in fear themselves or inciting fear in others?
7. Would the removal of this character have a significant effect on the storyline?
8. Does this story and/or character reflect your lived experience?
9. Has your project engaged consultants, subject matter experts, or persons with lived experiences that reflect the communities portrayed in your story?
10. Does your project depict an underrepresented immigration experience?

# Index

## A

AAPI 28-30  
alien 7  
Asian, Asian American and Pacific Islander 28, 29, 33, 34  
assimilation 11  
asylee, asylum seeker 9, 12, 35  
asylum 9, 12, 15, 18, 19, 25

## B

Black, Black immigrants 28-31  
border, border wall 12, 18, 20, 21, 25, 35

## C

Chinese Exclusion Act 33  
citizenship 6, 12, 13, 15-17, 19, 24, 26, 33, 34  
climate displacement, climate migration 9  
climate migrant, climate refugee 9  
Constitution-Free Zone 21

## D

DACA, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals 26, 27, 35  
DACA recipient 9  
Department of Homeland Security 19, 34  
deportation 4, 6, 9, 13, 17, 18, 19, 20, 26, 27, 34, 35  
detainee 18  
detention center 22  
Dreamer, DREAMer, Dreamers 9, 27  
driver's license 26, 27

## E

employment 27, 34  
employment authorization 27

## F

family-based migration 12  
family reunification 12, 34  
family separation 12, 13, 20, 35  
fear, fear-based 6, 18, 28, 36, 38  
federal income tax 27

## G

“good immigrant” 6, 36, 38  
green card 12, 13, 15, 17, 34

## H

H-1B visa 16  
Haiti, Haitian migrants 18, 30  
Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) 20

## I

illegal, illegal alien, illegal immigrant 7  
Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (IIRIRA) 34  
immigrant 9-10  
Immigration Act of 1882 33  
Immigration Act of 1924 (Johnson-Reed Act) 34  
Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) 18, 20, 22, 34, 35  
Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 (Hart-Celler Act) 34

## L

Latine, Latinx 28-30  
legal permanent resident 9, 19, 27  
LGBTQ 11

## M

marriage, “marriage miracle” 12  
Middle Eastern 28  
migrant 10  
migrant worker 10  
mixed-status family 13

## N

Nationality Act of 1790 33  
“national origins” quota 34  
naturalization 16, 19, 34  
non-citizen 19, 22

## R

refugee 9, 10, 12, 15, 34

## S

sanctuary, sanctuary city 22  
social security number 9, 26, 27  
Special Immigrant Juvenile (SIJ)  
Visa 16

## T

Temporary Protected Status (TPS) 17, 27  
temporary stay 27  
Title 42 25, 35  
Trump 10, 12, 20, 24, 25, 35

## U

unauthorized 7  
undocumented 7  
undocuqueer 11  
United States Border Patrol 20  
United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) 7, 16, 19  
United States Customs and Border Protection (CBP) 20  
U visa 17

## V

vote 27

## W

work authorization 27

## #

100-Mile Border Zone 20, 21

# About and Contact

## About Define American

Define American empowers diverse and nuanced storytelling about immigrant experiences across mediums and industries through research, partnerships, and storyteller engagement. Founded in 2011 by Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and Tony-nominated producer Jose Antonio Vargas, our work is helping audiences see all immigrants with their full humanity. To learn more, visit [defineamerican.com](http://defineamerican.com).

## Special Thanks

Jenn Bender, Rose Cuison-Villazor, Haiyun Damon-Feng, Leezia Dhalla, Brianna Dimas, Adrián Escárate, Steven Hubbard, Charlene Joy Jimenez, Yusra Khafagi, Sarah E. Lowe, Juno Maldonado, Ana Murillo, DJ Reed, Shauna Siggelkow, Nick Sweeney, Leani García Torres, Lynn Tramonte, Dulce Valencia, Bethany Wearden, Nan Wu, Jonathan Yu

Define American is led by its Founder and President, Jose Antonio Vargas

Design by [Madeo](#)

## Photography

Cover photos are from A24's Problemista, CBS' Bob Hearts Abishola, Hulu's Taste the Nation, A24's Everything Everywhere All at Once, Disney+'s National Treasure: Edge of History, and Netflix's Mo.

All images used in the guide are the sole property of the networks the series belong to. The still photos are used under educational fair use guidelines, for the explicit purpose of supporting this guide.

## Define American Contacts

General Inquiries  
[info@defineamerican.com](mailto:info@defineamerican.com)

Media Inquiries  
[press@defineamerican.com](mailto:press@defineamerican.com)

**DEFINE**

**AMERICAN**

## Explore other original resources from Define American



Change the Narrative, Change the World 2022: The Power of Immigrant Representation on Television



Creativity is Boundless: An Inclusive Guide



American Dreaming: The Roadmap to Resilience for Undocumented Storytellers



'Immigration Will Destroy Us' and Other Talking Points